OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC G

retro GAMER

ULTIMATE GUIDE: PINBALL DREAMS

ANDREAS AXELSSON REVISITS HIS FANTASTIC PINBALL SIM

THE EVOLUTION OF EARTHWORM JIM

DAVID PERRY, NICK BRUTY AND TOMMY TALLARICO ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF SHINY'S OUTRAGEOUSLY ODD ANNELID

CRASH BANDICOOT AND SPYRO

HOW TWO NINETIES MASCOTS JOINED FORCES TO CREATE THE GBA FUSION SERIES

COLLECTING SONIC GAMES

WILL THE BLUE BLUR COST YOU A FORTUNE?

PLUS

MIKIE
STORM
AGGELOS
JAMES ROLFE
TERRA CRESTA
ROLLING THUNDER 2
ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CAMELS
WINDJAMMERS 2
R-TYPE DELTA

THE MAKING OF DARK SEED

THE ADVENTURE GAME THAT FUSED DIFFICULT PUZZLES WITH HR GIGER

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE SSX SERIES

INSIDE THE HIT PS2 FRANCHISE THAT ALMOST STARTED OUT ON DREAMCAST

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THE RETROBATES

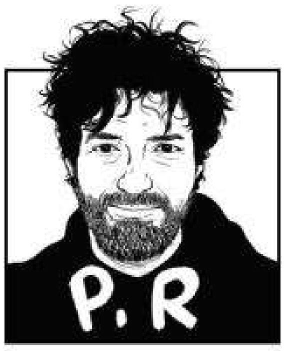
WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE EARTHWORM JIM MOMENT?

DARRAN JONES
For me it's the outrageously slick animations and brilliant character designs. It felt so different to all the other Mega Drive games I owned.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two daughters and an award-winning magazine all under one roof!
Currently playing:
The GG Shinobi
Favourite game of all time:
Strider

TIM EMPEY
"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration." Dunno why Peter Puppy was always quoting *Dune* in the cartoon, but it made me laugh.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service
Currently playing:
Far Cry 6
Favourite game of all time:
God Hand

NICK THORPE
I love quiz shows, so when *Earthworm Jim 2* incorporated a totally nonsensical one I was a very happy chap.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing:
Detroit: Become Human
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

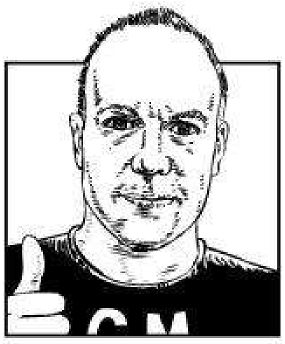
ANDY SALTER
Only thing I remember is the theme song from the cartoon series… groovy… never played the games.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord…* Modded of course
Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War



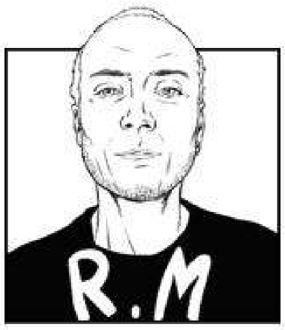
PAUL ROSE
Launching a cow into space. 'Nuff said.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing:
Mini Motorways
Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2

PAUL DRURY
Watching my mate Oliver Wilmot play the sequel on his Twitch channel. I could appreciate the level design and humour with someone skilled on the joypad, not an idiot like me struggling through.
Expertise: Sharpie permanent markers
Currently playing:
Dying Light 2, Stay Human
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

ANDREW FISHER
While I'm not a big fan of the games themselves, I did enjoy the anarchic *Earthworm Jim* cartoon series in the Nineties.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing:
Robot Jet Action
Favourite game of all time:
Paradroid



GRAEME MASON
COW LAUNCHED!
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing:
The Outer Worlds
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



RORY MILNE
I knew *Earthworm Jim* was something special when I took out my first crow with his blaster in the original Mega Drive game. He's just the perfect vehicle for cartoon violence and well-worked gameplay.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing:
Project Gotham Racing
Favourite game of all time:
Tempest

LOADING...

The Nineties were rife with platform heroes, from Sonic and Mario to James Pond and Superfrog. By far one of my favourites however was Earthworm Jim, the zany creation of artist Doug TenNapel.

Just the idea of an earthworm in a high-powered spacesuit is absurdly silly, so when the team at the newly formed Shiny Entertainment saw Doug's drawings, they knew they had found the star of the game that would launch the studio's name. That story is told within this very issue, but we also explore how Shiny's inventive game was expanded to the Mega-CD, its sequel and several other non-Shiny releases. We've even managed to get Tommy Tallarico to tell us a little bit about Jim's new adventure for the incoming Intellivision Amico.

But worry not, if you're not in the mood for silly, spacesuit-wearing annelids then we've got plenty of other fantastic features for you to enjoy, from the story of Mastertronic's budget *Gauntlet* clone *Storm* to Konami's jaunty arcade game *Mikie*. We also reveal some of the best *Sonic* games to add to your collection, talk to a number of chiptune maestros and rediscover the brilliance of Digital Illusions' *Pinball Dreams*. This issue also marks the return of our revamped Homebrew section which is now being overseen by Andrew Fisher. We hope you like the new look.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine,
Darran

retro GAMER
EARTHWORM JIM
SONIC GAMES
PLUS

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>> Load 230 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

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Crazy news as Microsoft gets in a spending mood and acquires Activision and Blizzard for outrageous sums of cash

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This month Paul is wondering what's happened about computer game violence

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Irem's game may look new and shiny but it's also built solidly on the past

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Young Nick thought all Sega arcade racing games were great. Young Nick was wrong

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Martyn Carroll chats to the team who made this rather impressive *Gauntlet* clone for the Amstrad CPC and other 8-bit systems

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Did you know there were three different versions of Konami's game? Graeme Mason does and he's played all of them

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We chat to François Perez about coding, designing and creating the music for this charming action adventure

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Meet the insanely talented chiptune artists who are still making music on devices like the Game Boy

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We're all getting older and so is Sony's third console, that's why it's in the mag

x3
50%
x758
100%
x5

18

The Evolution Of: Earthworm Jim
Dave Perry, Nick Bruty and Tommy Tallarico discuss the twisted journey of the iconic Nineties hero, from his inventive first game to his incoming Amico adventure

CRAZY
HAPPY HOUR
LAUGH
PARTY land
LAUGH AGAIN
x2
x4
x6
x8

50

Ultimate Guide: Pinball Dreams
Nick plays the hell out of Digital Illusions' fantastic debut and quizzes Andreas Axelsson about its creation

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f the Scrolls.
Michael. I've been sending you
er the radio. The Ancients have
alien embryo into your brain.

The Making Of: Dark Seed

Michael Cranford and Joby Otero recall working on this twisted Giger-infused adventure game

retroradar

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

noop
[ATVI]Insidious
iNgEnVy
Snoop
23 | 240

» [PC] *Call Of Duty* will become just one of many iconic FPS series Microsoft owns – others include *Halo, Doom* and *Perfect Dark*.

ACTIVISION ACQUISITION

Microsoft to absorb gaming's original third-party developer

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Microsoft buys one of gaming's biggest and oldest publishers

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Paul wants to know why videogame violence is hardly talked about today

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We chat to the German DJ Remute whose latest album is being released on a Nintendo 64 cartridge

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Darran's put his back out so Nick is once again tasked with travelling back in time to the mid-Noughties

Industry observers will have taken keen interest in Microsoft's game studio acquisitions over the last few years – the company swallowed up eight companies between 2018 and 2020, the largest of which was *Doom* and *Wolfenstein* owner ZeniMax Media. However, the company's latest deal looks set to dwarf all of those combined as it has announced plans to purchase Activision Blizzard for $68.7 billion. If the acquisition proceeds as planned, it will be Microsoft's largest ever, comfortably surpassing the $26.2 billion it paid for the business-oriented social network LinkedIn in 2016.

Activision has been a constant presence in the videogame market since 1979, when it was founded by ex-Atari programmers who were frustrated with a lack of recognition and royalties. The company initially did well with Atari 2600 releases, but struggled in the wake of the market crash and by 1986, all of the original founders had left the company. After a period of decline and a brief name change to Mediagenic, the company was purchased in 1991 for $500,000 by a group of investors led by present-day CEO Bobby Kotick. A massive restructuring effort followed and by 1997 Activision started to acquire companies – first Raven Software, then over the following years the likes of Neversoft, Treyarch and Toys For Bob by 2005. In 2008, Activision merged with Blizzard owner Vivendi Games to create Activision Blizzard and overtake Electronic Arts as gaming's largest third-party publisher.

It's easy to see what Microsoft stands to gain from this deal. Activision Blizzard has not only major game development capacity, but an enormous library of active intellectual properties that it could use to bolster its content offering across Xbox and PC. *Call Of Duty, World Of Warcraft, Crash Bandicoot, Spyro The Dragon, Overwatch, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, Diablo* and more. What's more, it gives Microsoft control over plenty of dormant favourites such as *Zork, Pitfall!, Rock N Roll Racing, Starcraft, Soldier Of Fortune* and *Guitar Hero*. Any or all of these could be made exclusive to Xbox should Microsoft decide to do so, or alternatively it could enjoy a major slice of the software sales on

» While Microsoft has said it will continue to support other platforms, the benefits of enforcing Xbox exclusivity must be incredibly enticing.

» [PC] Back catalogue titles like *Starcraft 2* seem like easy additions to the PC version of Game Pass.

Score: 13 160
12
0/2
Sodalicious!
360

» [iOS] The deal also includes King, which has major success in the mobile market with games like *Candy Crush Soda Saga*.

31960
10:36
ACTIVISION

» [Atari 2600] Could we see *Pitfall!* revived as an *Uncharted* competitor? Probably not, but it's nice to dream.

Sony and Nintendo platforms, just as it does with *Minecraft* today. For its part, Microsoft has stated that, "Activision Blizzard games are enjoyed on a variety of platforms and we plan to continue to support those communities moving forward," suggesting that it leans towards the latter approach.

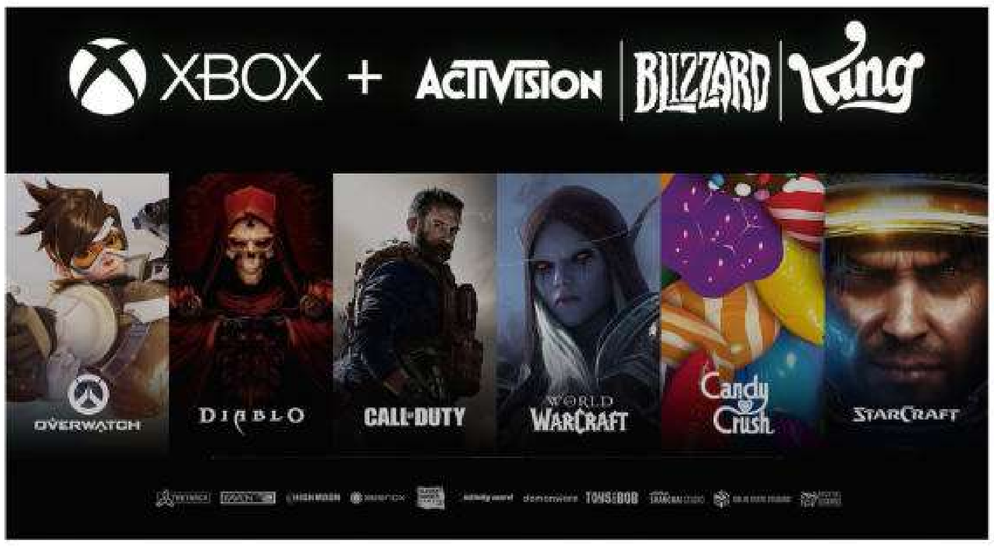
For gamers, there are some truly tantalising prospects resulting from this deal. Microsoft has already confirmed its intention to add "as many Activision Blizzard games as we can" to Game Pass on Xbox and PC, which only makes those services a more attractive proposition, particularly if new releases go straight on the service at launch as Microsoft's major first-party releases currently do. This could also potentially remove some barriers to past games being added to the backwards compatibility list, although Microsoft has claimed to be finished with that project. More speculatively, the potential for crossovers is intriguing – you could well see Crash or Spyro teaming up with Banjo and Kazooie, or Master Chief appearing as a cameo character in *Overwatch 2*.

One area that will be less attractive for Microsoft is the company culture that it is taking over. In July 2021, the California Department Of Fair Employment And Housing filed a lawsuit against the company over allegations of sexual harassment and discrimination, complaining of a "pervasive frat boy workplace culture" and unequal pay between the men and women in the company. Activision Blizzard responded to the claims, calling them "distorted, and in many cases false" and saying that, "The picture the DFEH paints is not the Blizzard workplace of today." Employees dissatisfied with their working environment have recently staged walkouts and begun efforts to unionise, and have stated that those efforts will continue regardless of the buyout.

Then there's the CEO, Bobby Kotick. He is the longest-serving CEO of any publicly traded technology company, and the company has clearly grown enormously under his leadership. However, he has long been an unpopular figure with gamers – in 2009 he attracted negative attention for comments made about wanting to raise the prices of games further, in the wake of the financial crisis, and wanting to "take the fun out of making games". In recent months some sections of the company's staff and shareholders have called for him to resign over the company's alleged cultural problems, but Microsoft has already stated that he will remain in place as CEO, and upon the conclusion of the deal will report to Microsoft Gaming CEO Phil Spencer.

Such a large and complex merger is of course subject to various hurdles, including approval from government regulators and Activision Blizzard's shareholders. That means that the deal isn't due to close until 2023 and the two companies will continue to operate independently for the time being, so any changes resulting from the acquisition won't be made apparent for some time. Until then, we'll keep an eye on this story and update you should any major developments occur. *

> "The deal isn't due to close until 2023 and the two companies will continue to operate independently for the time being"



» This was the image used to announce the acquisition – interestingly, it focuses primarily on Blizzard games.

» [PlayStation] *Crash Bandicoot*, once considered a PlayStation icon, may well end up Xbox exclusive in the future.

THOSE WE'VE LOST

Unfortunately, this month we bring you further news of losses within the game development community. 22cans head of art Paul McLaughlin passed away at the age of 57 in December, following a long struggle with cancer. He began his career with Emerald Software in Ireland in the late-Eighties, but soon moved to England to join Bullfrog, where he worked on games including *Populous II*, *Syndicate*, *Magic Carpet* and *Dungeon Keeper*. Paul also joined Peter Molyneux at Lionhead, working on games including *Black & White* and *Fable*, before arriving at his most recent studio.

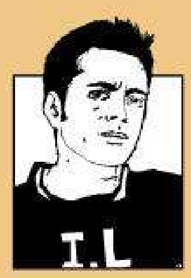
Stewart Gilray began his career in the late-Eighties as a freelance programmer, before becoming a producer in the Nineties, working on games including *Pinball Dreams* and *In Cold Blood*. In 2006 he founded the development team Just Add Water, which has created remakes of the *Oddworld* games, a new *Micro Machines* entry and the isometric throwback *Lumo*. Stewart passed away due to COVID-19 on 6 January, at the age of 51. He is survived by two children and his wife Bec Gilray, who has since revealed that Stewart was unvaccinated due to a severe phobia of needles, and urged people to get vaccinated.

Our thoughts are with the families and friends of both men.

» Stewart Gilray formed Just Add Water in 2006.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

So that was Christmas



It's behind us now, so do you mind if I bring up Christmas? It probably seems weird talking about it as we hurtle deeper into 2022, but there's something I really have to get off my chest.

My Christmas, like that of millions of others, was not exactly how I planned it. A few days before, I got COVID. I had it really bad for one night and then got better pretty quickly. The physical stuff wasn't the problem. It was what went with it, namely, I didn't get to see my kids over the 'festive' period. That was tough. Isolating on my own for ten days not being able to hang out with my two boys.

The first couple of days I was really miserable and allowed myself to be consumed by self-pity. Then once I accepted it, it actually became OK. So our gift giving was going to be a week later? Does that really matter? It didn't make too much of a difference as their present was a Steam Deck, the new console which had been postponed until February anyway. Everything was running late unfortunately.

Thing is, we still had a lot of fun together even though we were 30 miles apart. We spent a good few hours of Christmas Eve on a Zoom call playing some really dumb games. *Ultimate Chicken Horse* is this ridiculous platformer where you have to travel from A to B. Except you get given all kinds of weird weapons and traps to put in the way of your opponents. It's really silly, very funny and bloody frustrating. Both me and the kids regularly screamed how much we hated the thing. But there was also a lot of laughter and congratulations when someone completed a course that looked impossible.

Heave Ho is another dumb game where you have to hold hands to help make it across another course. [That sounds like it would make for a good *Fall Guys* level - Ed] This one I struggled with. My brain just could not get to grips with, well, how to get to grips with it. I was a disaster and A and K told me at every available opportunity. It really got me thinking. I love your *Call Of Duties* and your *Halos*, but there is something magic about playing really simple games with low-res graphics and easy concepts. That thrill of calling someone out for a silly mistake or cheering them on when they're close to getting a personal best. Even though we were miles away, I felt closer to my children than if they had been here playing different games in different rooms.

It's something I'm going to carry into 2022. If I am feeling lonely I know I can always set up another gaming session and suddenly the world isn't so grey. I love my boys and I can be present for them whether I'm in the same building or on the other side of the world.

Right, that's the last time I mention Christmas and the other C word. I promise. How's your Easter looking? *

"We still had a lot of fun together even though we were 30 miles apart"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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retroradar COLUMN

FEATURING DIGITISER'S MR BIFFO

Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

A history of violence

Whatever happened to videogame scare stories? You know what I'm talking about, "Nintendo killed my son!"… "Videogames brainwash children!"… "Epidemic of youth violence!"

Every time there was a new *Carmageddon*, *Mortal Kombat* or… I dunno… *Endorfun*, our elders would clutch their pearls and shriek that we were all doomed unless they banned this sick filth. Or words to that effect. Heck, even *Pokémon* got dragged into the general air that gaming was causing society to crumble, when an episode of the cartoon was alleged to have caused seizures.

Spoilers: the world might not be in the best place right now, but I doubt much of that has anything remotely to do with *Night Trap*.

While the videogame nasties uproar may have appeared as a concerted media and political campaign to destroy an industry that was still finding its feet, it's arguable that these sorts of stories made games more popular. The Streisand Effect meant that the more the media tried to tear down the latest beat-'em-up, the more curious 12 year olds became. There's no fruit so enticing as the forbidden. Take it from somebody who has been stealing his neighbour's apples for the past decade.

> "There's no fruit so enticing as the forbidden"

History has proven that the gaming-inspired epidemic of youth violence never materialised. I don't know about any of you, but since first playing *Mortal Kombat* on the Mega Drive, I've barely done half-a-dozen murders.

Modern games aren't without their controversies, of course. These days they tend to be less about the content of games, and more about working practices at games companies, rather than whether games will turn our children into bloodthirsty maniacs, or cause seizures. It's interesting (read: depressing) how the mainstream tabloids of the Nineties gleefully pushed a sensationalist 'videogame nasties' agenda, yet today seem less interested in depressing accusations of institutionalised sexual misconduct at big games companies.

Even though I'm an old man now, I sort of miss that feeling of games being a bit dangerous. Is that tragic? Is that a bit sad that I, a man who looks and smells like he should be collecting his pension, regrets one of his hobbies being a bit less edgy, and more acceptable, than it once was? As multimedia corporate products, games are more pipe and slippers now than something for the establishment to fear. These days you'd have to pay a paper to run a videogame scare story.

When did this happen? *Grand Theft Auto V* came out in 2013, so is almost old enough now to be considered retro. Yet, I don't remember many negative headlines surrounding its violence, themes, or casual misogyny – at least, not outside the need of games websites to feed opinions into their content furnace.

Perhaps we grew up and took over the toyshop. Whatever the case, it happened when nobody noticed. It just sort of petered out. The tabloids moved on, found new targets and we just carried on playing our games, the same as we'd always done. ★

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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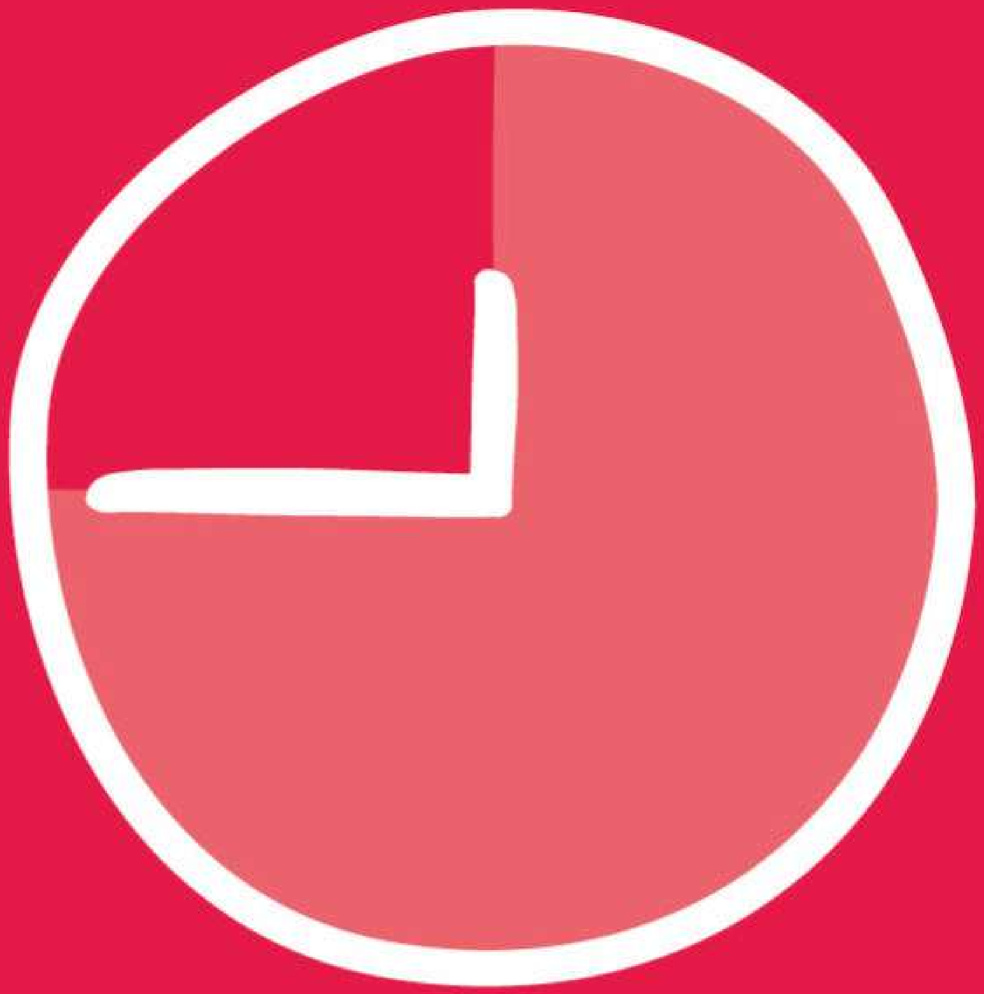

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» Remute is such a fan of the Nintendo 64 that his next album is being released on an N64 cartridge.

SUPERPOSITION
REMUTE
R64

» A special limited edition of *Remute 64* will include a 7-inch record featuring two album tracks.

Remute

We chat to the DJ who is taking the N64's sound to a whole new level

If you have any interest in chiptune music you're probably already aware of Remute. The German DJ not only creates some cracking tunes but has released albums across a number of gaming cartridges for systems like the SNES, Mega Drive and Game Boy. His latest project is *R64*, his brand-new album for the Nintendo 64. Here he tells us how the project came together.

Were you a big gamer growing up?

I am a born geek! I've grown up literally surrounded by home computers and game consoles and received my first C64 when I was five years old. Gaming made me.

» Remute is a successful DJ and has released a number of albums now on various game cartridges.

When did you decide to first create music?

I have been releasing music as 'Remute' since 2002 – I was 19 years old when I put out my first vinyl record. I have been making music since my earliest teenage days, starting when I was around 13 years old. Then slowly, step by step, year after year, I transformed into Remute full time.

How difficult have you found it to squeeze your music albums onto videogame cartridges?

Every cartridge album is an adventure on its own. These adventures are sometimes fun and sometimes crazy as hell as you have to be very creative to work your way around various limitations. But overall I think that these challenges are very helpful for the creative process and I love to communicate with machines.

You previously released albums on SNES, Mega Drive, PC Engine and Game Boy. Which was the trickiest to create?

When working on cartridge albums for various consoles there's always a point when I get confronted with THE limitation that drives me nuts! I think the most trickiest album so far has been the SNES album *The Cult Of Remute*.

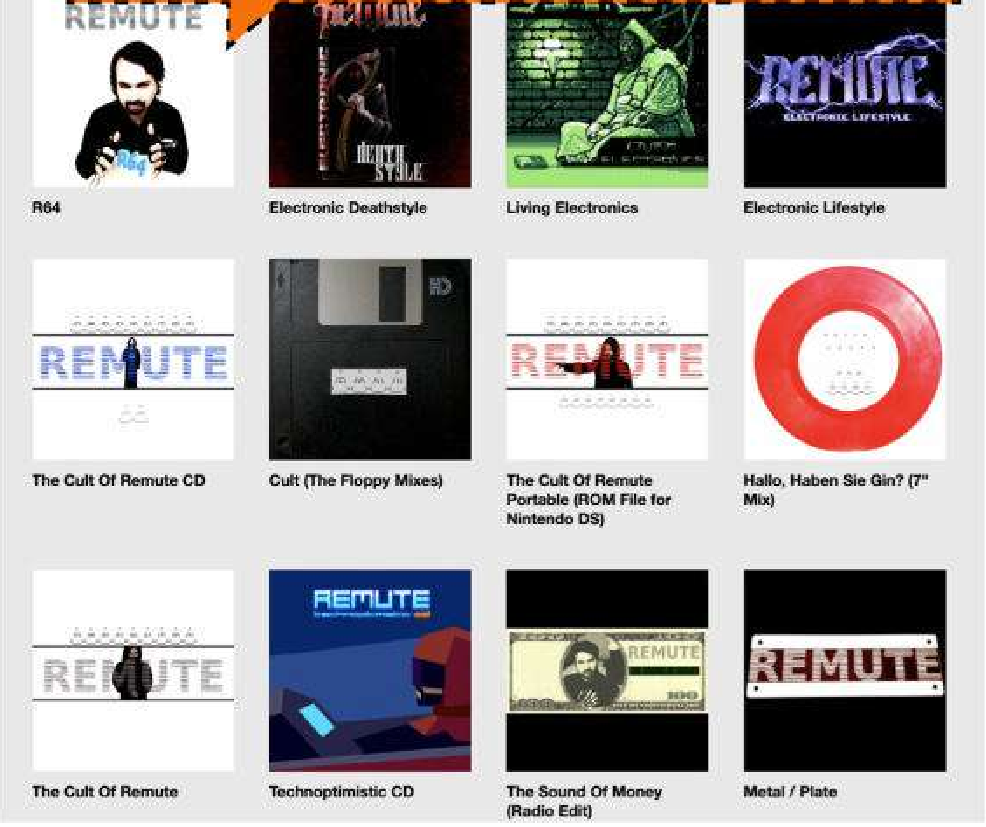
How so?

Well the SNES audio RAM is only 64 kilobytes and so ALL elements of a song have to fit into this very tiny storage space. That was very challenging for me as I had to strip down a lot of things. But in the end it is also a kind of 'test' – if a song survives the process of cutting down everything that's unnecessary and just focuses on the essentials, then it's a good song.

Why release your new album on a Nintendo 64 cartridge?

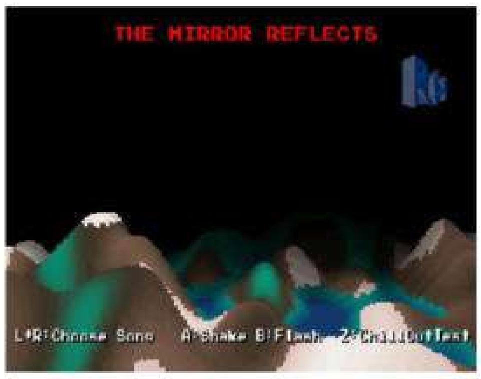
I wanted to create a 'spiritual successor' to *The Cult Of Remute*.

> "Rasky has a deep understanding of the N64 hardware which is in many ways definitely borderline rocket science"
> **REMUTE**



R64
Electronic Deathstyle
Living Electronics
Electronic Lifestyle
The Cult Of Remute CD
Cult (The Floppy Mixes)
The Cult Of Remute Portable (ROM File for Nintendo DS)
Hallo, Haben Sie Gin? (7" Mix)
The Cult Of Remute
Technoptimistic CD
The Sound Of Money (Radio Edit)
Metal / Plate

» You can find a selection of Remute's work at remute.bandcamp.com



» *R64* includes a cool visualiser so you've got something to watch while the album is playing.

The SNES album was actually based on many samples and bits I recorded on countless live jams in my studio – tediously edited, compressed and stripped down to fit into 64 kilobytes of the SNES audio RAM.

Tell us a little about *R64*.
Well *R64* is also based on many live sessions I recorded with synths like the Roland JD 990, Novation Peak or the Korg Prophecy. The way the N64 handles sound is quite similar to the SNES – everything is based on sequenced samples, but here I didn't have the harsh limitations like on the SNES. I had a whopping 8 megabytes for all songs and no further file size limits. Compared to the 64 kilobytes limit per song on the SNES this felt like heaven. I feel that *R64* is my most diverse and fun album so far.

You are working on *R64* with Rasky, an acclaimed N64 coder. How did that come about?
I've been following Rasky's work in the N64 homebrew scene for quite a time and I was very impressed. So we got in touch and it was a wonderful cooperation. Rasky has a deep understanding of the N64 hardware which is in many ways definitely borderline rocket science. I am curious what he's up for next – he really likes to push the N64 to the maximum.

What influenced the display that plays when the N64 is on and does it change for each new track?
There's also a visual player GUI in *R64* as well. After the title screen the user gets teleported to a strange, real-time generated 3D place and flies over some trippy objects reminiscent of *MTV Partyzone* and various demoscene experiments. It will get you in a special hypnotic mood and the direction, shapes and speed change for every track (it also reacts to certain track elements) and even some slight interaction will be possible.

Why use 8 megabytes of storage space instead of compression?
Sure, we could have gone down the 'lazy route' and compressed some audio files down to 32 or even 64 megabytes, but that would be totally unadventurous and also sound quite bad. We wanted to make something that gets generated and played back in real time – just as all my previous albums before. This saves file storage space, sounds decent and for this project 8 megabytes is just enough.

What programs do you use and what technical hurdles do you face?
I've composed the album with the multiformat tracker OpenMPT on a Windows PC. I've used the XM file format which first came out in the mid-Nineties for Fast Tracker 2 on MS-DOS. This file format allowed for extensive usage of samples I recorded during live sessions in my mostly old-school synth-based studio. The tricky hurdle was to edit these sessions and choose 'the essence' which then gets thrown into the tracker. When I finished the songs, Rasky converted them and integrated them into his custom-coded XM player engine for the N64 – this is the wizardry that works beneath the surface of *R64*.

» A lot of Remute's earlier cartridge albums have now sold out so you'll need to look online to find them.

Tell us a little about the limited edition version of *R64*.
The *R64 Plus Edition* comes with an additional blue 7-inch vinyl which features the two album songs *Superposition* and *Tradition Und Moderne*. The versions of these songs are some upgraded mixes exclusively made for vinyl.

What influences your music?
Electronics, life with electronics, living electronics.

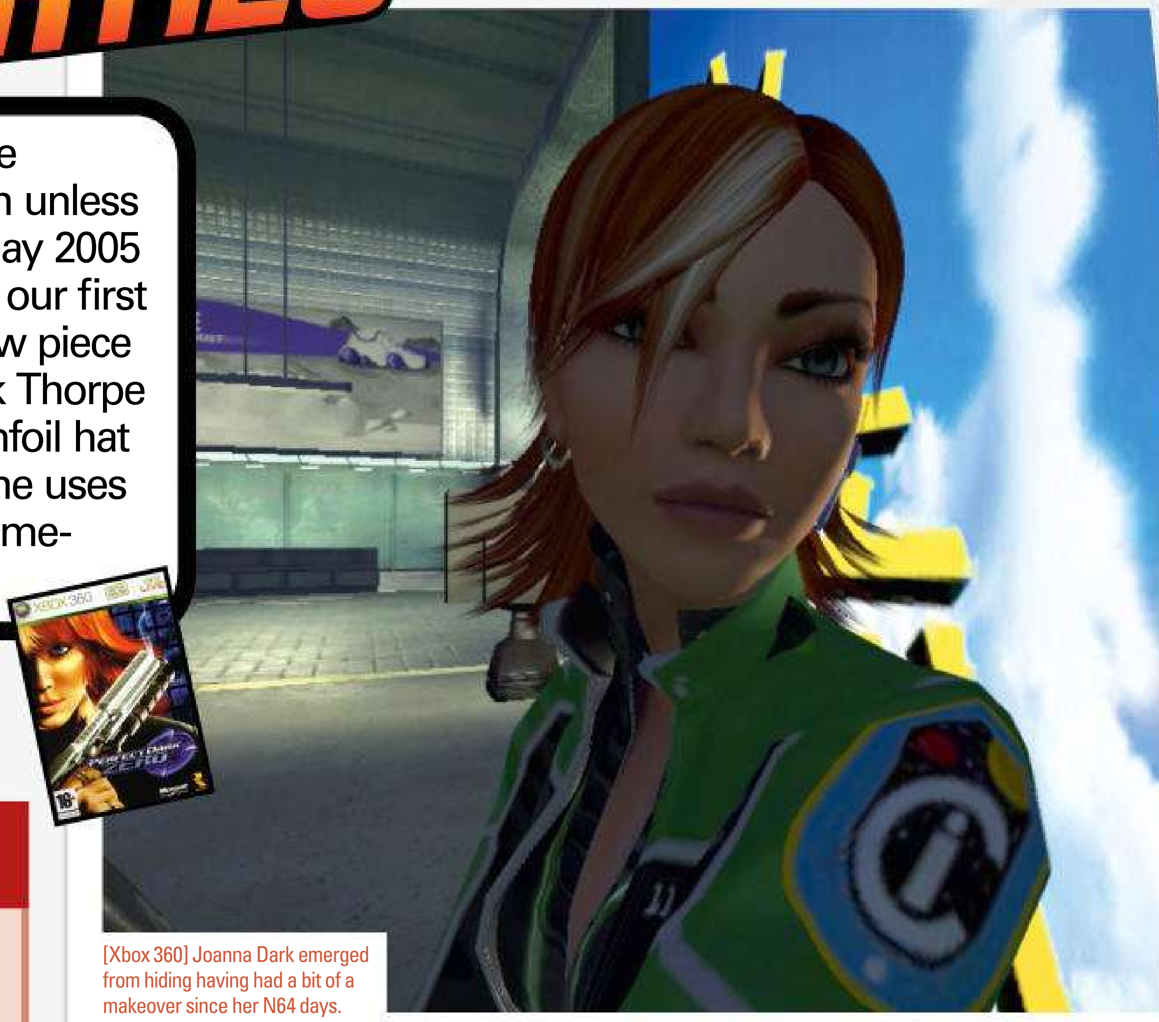
You clearly love Nintendo's 64-bit machine. What soundtracks from the console do you enjoy?
I absolutely love the *Extreme G* soundtrack! It's a total mid-Nineties rave techno blast! It perfectly accentuates the action-packed gameplay and is filled with energy! Oh, and of course there's also the *Tetrisphere* soundtrack – fantastic breakbeats! In general the Nintendo 64 had some great, almost CD-quality like soundtracks, despite being a cartridge-based console with very limited file storage space compared to CD ROM-based consoles of that era like the Playstation. ✱

If you like the sound of *R64*, or want to learn more about Remute, visit remute.bandcamp.com

» There's an excellent interview with Remute on RetroRGB. Watch it at https://bit.ly/rgbremute

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MAY 2005 – It's not the biggest gaming month unless you're a PC fan, but May 2005 is a big one as we get our first glimpse at a major new piece of hardware. Join Nick Thorpe as he dons the tinfoil hat and sunglasses he uses to manage his time-travel allergies


[Xbox 360] Joanna Dark emerged from hiding having had a bit of a makeover since her N64 days.

It's here! It's the Xbox 360! You can stand it on its side like a PS2 now! Wow!

NEWS MAY 2005

Chinese computer manufacturer Lenovo bought IBM's personal computer business on 1 May, paying $1.25 billion and assuming $500 million of IBM debt. Despite having popular product lines such as the ThinkPad laptops, the original PC manufacturer had wanted to transition away from selling directly to consumers.

On 5 May, the UK held a general election in which the Labour Party won a third consecutive victory, having campaigned on its record of economic stability. Tony Blair remained prime minister with a majority of 66 MPs and a 35.2% vote share, but these represented a loss of 48 seats and a 5.5% decline in share compared to the 2001 election. The Conservatives, led by Michael Howard, gained 33 MPs on 32.4% of the vote (up 0.7%). Charles Kennedy's Liberal Democrats gained 10 MPs and increased their vote share from 18.3% to 22%.

In football, Malcolm Glazer gained control of Manchester United on 12 May. Glazer had owned the Tampa Bay Buccaneers NFL franchise since 1995, and had been building a stake in Manchester United since 2003. On 21 May, Manchester United became the first team to lose an FA Cup final via penalty shoot-out. The Champions League final was also decided on penalties, with Liverpool coming back from a 3-0 half time deficit to defeat AC Milan 3-2 in the shoot-out.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 2005

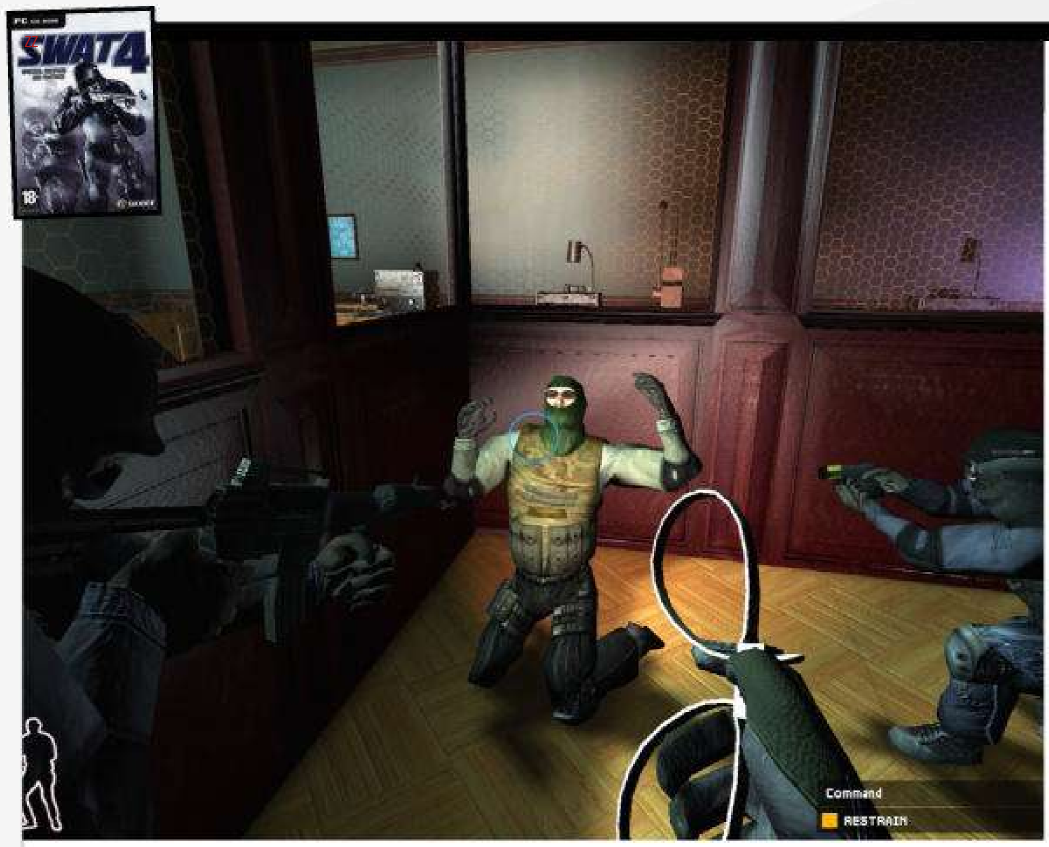
On 12 May, Microsoft officially unveiled its next generation successor to the Xbox, via a live MTV show from Hollywood hosted by Elijah Wood. The cast of *Pimp My Ride* provided a deeper look at the new hardware and its features, and The Killers were on hand for a musical performance. As far as software support was concerned, the offering was very heavy on Western developers, with no notable games from Japan. Rare's *Perfect Dark Zero* received the lion's share of attention, thanks to a behind-the-scenes trip to Rare and the first look at a networked multiplayer game. The 22-minute show also included short clips of *Kameo: Elements Of Power*, *Project Gotham Racing 3*, *Gears Of War*, *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 3*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06*, *Need For Speed: Most Wanted*, *Madden NFL 06*, *Quake 4*, *Call Of Duty 2*, *The Darkness* and *Saints Row*.

More detail was provided by Microsoft in an accompanying press release. As well as offering the usual kind of upgrade in computing power and support for high-definition TVs, the Xbox 360 promised a revolution in online connectivity. Xbox Live would now feature a unified marketplace for downloadable content including game demos and trailers, expansion content and even full games via the newly emphasised Xbox Live Arcade service. The new hardware also sported an easily detachable hard disk, removable face plates and support for wireless controllers as standard, and would be able to play back media from DVDs and CDs as well as USB devices and even via network sources. Microsoft did not provide launch dates or prices for the new system.

Of course, the Xbox 360 was the future. In the present, the biggest multiplatform game of the month was *Lego Star Wars*, which broadly received good reviews. Scores for the game included 8/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, 7.6/10 from *Official Xbox Magazine*, 7/10 from *Edge* and 6/10 from *XBM*. At the high end of the scale, *PC Gamer* awarded the game 87% with Kieron Gillen commenting that it was "cute and accessible, but with enough ironic gags and buried challenge for the grown ups", and "as good a place as any for a gamer to rediscover their love of fun". You might think that the

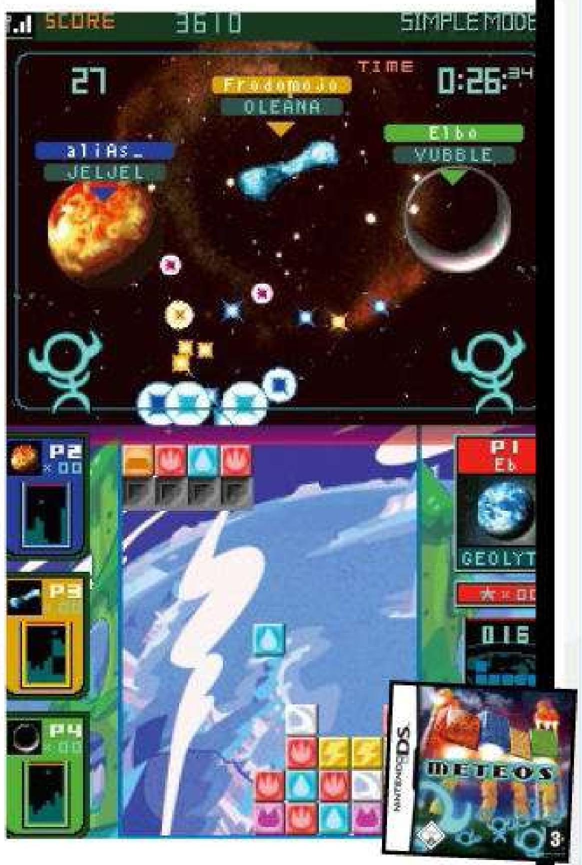
[Xbox] With all that green going on, *Pariah* sure as heck looks like an Xbox game. Good branding.

[PC] Darran's low score in *games™* proved to be wholly uncontroversial, generating no online backlash at all.



[PC] We're pretty sure a modern *SWAT* would include a mission where you get a false report at a streamer's house.

[DS] "No scrubs allowed" takes on a very different meaning when playing multiplayer in *Meteos*.



reviewer for *games™* was similarly impressed, having mentioned that the miniature renditions of iconic characters "caused a nostalgic tear of joy to seep from our jaded eyes". However, the game scored 4/10 for being "basic, generic platforming that simply requires you to collect lots of different items", with "ropey" teammate AI and combat that consisted of "stodgy button mashing". Elsewhere, car modding fans could enjoy *Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition* (84% *Play*, 8/10 *Official PS2*, 8/10 *XBM*, 6/10 *games™*)

When it came to exclusive games, PS2 owners got the *Micro Machines*-alike *Mashed: Fully Loaded* (8/10, *Official PS2*) and the gory first person shooter *Cold Winter*, with *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* declaring it "shallower than the kids' end of the swimming pool, but it's undeniably good fun", in an 8/10 review. First-person shooter *Pariah* made its sole console appearance on Xbox and received strong reviews, earning 7/10 from *games™* and 8.9/10 from *OXM*. Darran Jones gave the game 9/10 in *XBM*, praising the game's set pieces and map editor and describing it as "the best alternative to two of the greatest Xbox games ever made", in reference to the *Halo* series. The only domestic GameCube release worth getting excited about was Namco's *Baten Kaitos*, which earned 83% from *NGC*. The game's combat was considered "engaging, rewarding and strategic enough to make the inevitable repeated battles bearable", but the atmosphere was criticised.

But if anyone got the best format exclusives this month, it was surely PC owners. *SWAT 4* from Irrational Games was *PC Gamer*'s top scoring game of the month, with the tactical shooter earning 91% for being "a game that rewards care and attention by making you part of a brutally efficient machine". If that wasn't to your liking, you could opt for a second helping of superhero real-time strategy in *Freedom Force Vs The Third Reich* (88%), submarine sim sequel *Silent Hunter III* (88%), real-time strategy in *Empire Earth II* (85%), the offbeat driving sequel *Trackmania Sunrise* (82%) or the indie shoot-'em-up *Starscape* (80%). *Edge* awarded *Freedom Force Vs The Third Reich* and *Trackmania Sunrise* 7/10 each, with *games™* giving the latter 8/10 and describing it as "the most overblown, flashy and ridiculous racer of the year".

Handheld fans could at least enjoy *Meteos* on the DS, assuming they had access to import games. The puzzler earned 5/5 from *NGC* and 8/10 from *Edge*, though the latter cautioned that "it can be beaten, for the most part, by scrubbing blindly at the screen". If you preferred a different handheld, *WipEout Pure* received its first import reviews, gaining 8/10 from *Edge* and *games™*, with the latter calling the futuristic racer "another stunning must-have PSP title". That's it for now – join us next month for reactions to Microsoft's big reveal. *

CHARTS

MAY 2005

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Gran Turismo 4 (Sony)
2 – FIFA Street (EA)
3 – Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30 (Ubisoft)
4 – Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening (Capcom)
5 – Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (Konami)

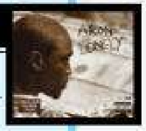
XBOX

1 – Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory (Ubisoft)
2 – Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30 (Ubisoft)
3 – FIFA Street (EA)
4 – Timesplitters: Future Perfect (EA)
5 – The Punisher (THQ)

GAMECUBE

1 – Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat (Nintendo)
2 – The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords (Nintendo)
3 – Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie (THQ)
4 – Donkey Konga (Nintendo)
5 – Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (Nintendo)

MUSIC



1 – Lonely (Akon)
2 – Feel Good Inc (Gorillaz)
3 – (Is This The Way To) Amarillo (Tony Christie featuring Peter Kay)
4 – Hate It Or Love It (Game featuring 50 Cent)
5 – Signs (Snoop Dogg/Charlie Wilson/Justin Timberlake)

THIS MONTH IN…

Play

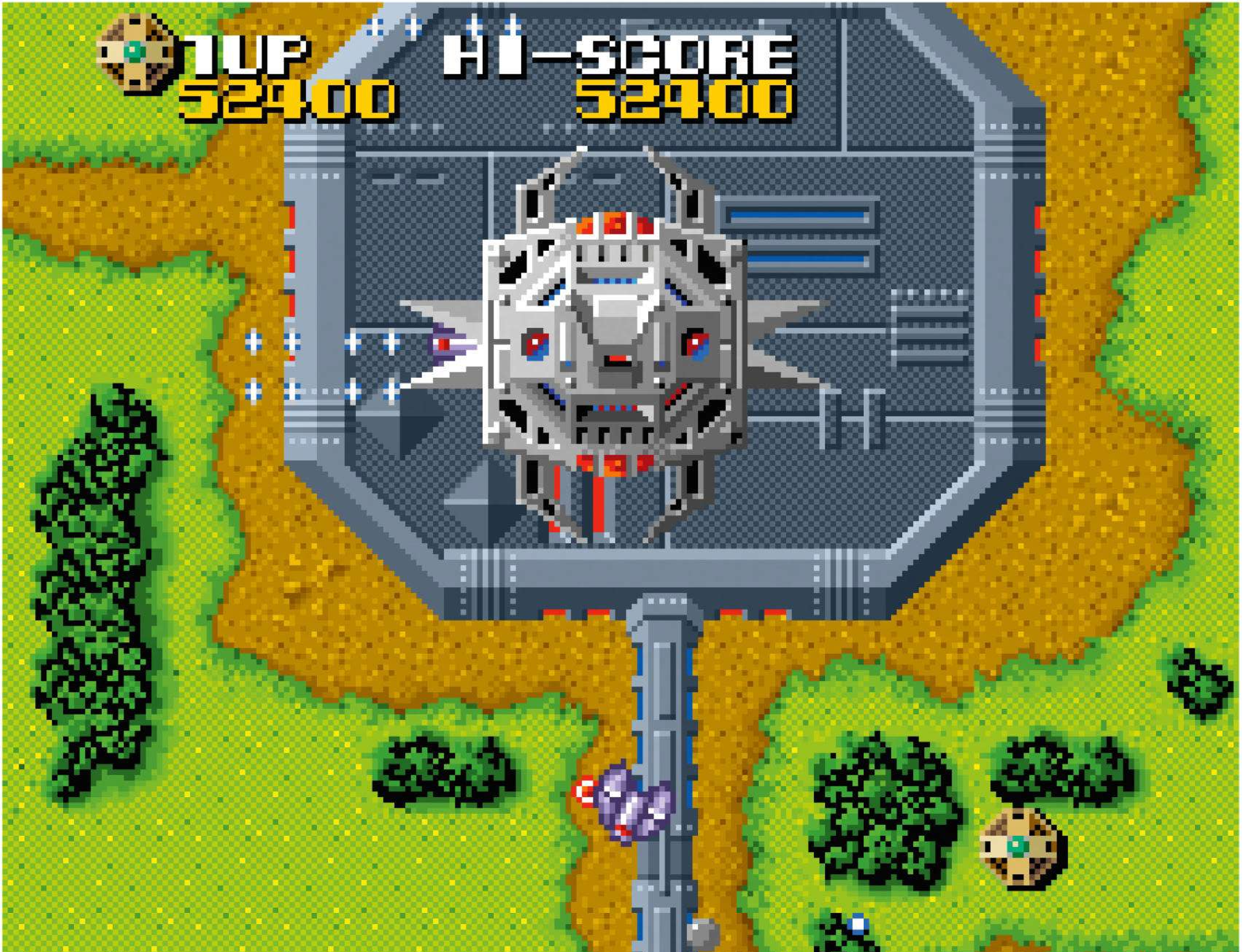
"*Grand Theft Auto* should be set in other places than America," says reader Kevin Martin of Belfast. "An idea that could work out is having it set in Northern Ireland during The Troubles and it could be like in *San Andreas* with gangs." Less than ten years after the Good Friday Agreement, we're sure that couldn't possibly go down badly with anyone.

Official Xbox Mag

"It's going to be a hell of a lot darker, that's for sure," an unnamed Sega representative tells the *Official Xbox Magazine*. "I mean, this guy carries a gun around. When was the last time you saw Sonic packing?" Yes, Sonic's frenemy Shadow is getting a spin-off game. "It's like *KOTOR* with hedgehogs," says Sega's source, straining credibility.

Cube

Tim's not impressed with *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2*, which "isn't really a fighting game". He gives it 6.2/10 and decides that it's better left "for the few remaining fans of a dying and dull series". We wonder if he played *Dragon Ball Fighter Z*? Meanwhile, Ryan King likes Trunks because "he's got grey hair like an old man but in fact, he's a little boy".


1UP
52400
HI-SCORE
52400

Terra Cresta

DEFINITELY WORTH THE WAIT

» ARCADE » 1985 » NICHIBUTSU

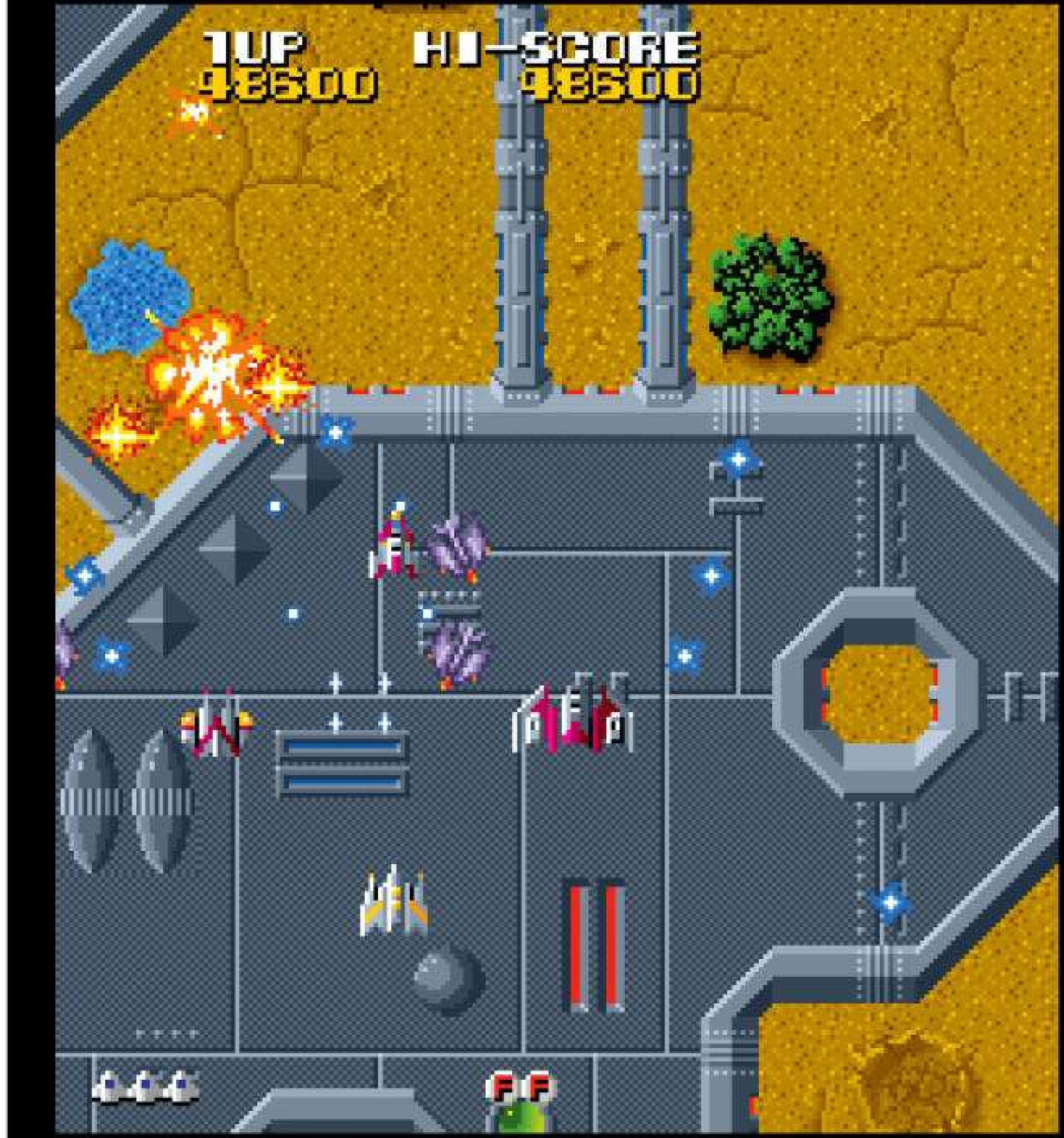
I'm a huge fan of Hamster's *Arcade Archives* range and have been pestering the publisher so we can write an article for ages. Hamster has released a huge number of arcade and Neo Geo ports for the Switch and PS4 and many of them are shmups. Needless to say, I try to pick up its games whenever I get the opportunity.

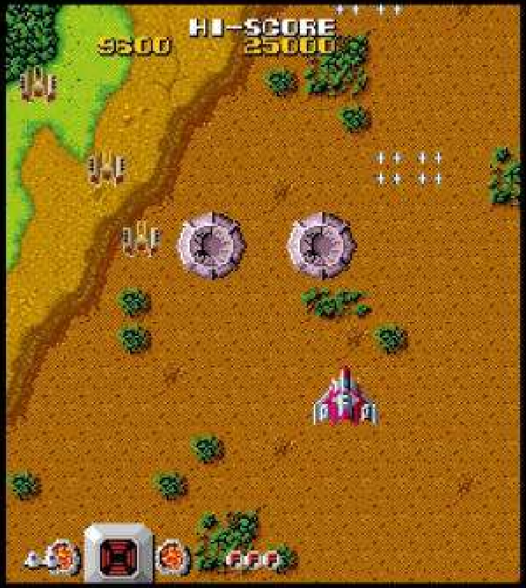
One of my most recent purchases was *Terra Cresta*, which I grabbed in the sales along with *Terra Force* (which is by the same developer, but I'm not sure is part of the same series). I didn't play it much in the arcades, but my burning memory of the game was that you could transform into a fiery phoenix which was reminiscent of the ship transformation in *Battle Of The Planets*, a cartoon I absolutely loved as a kid.

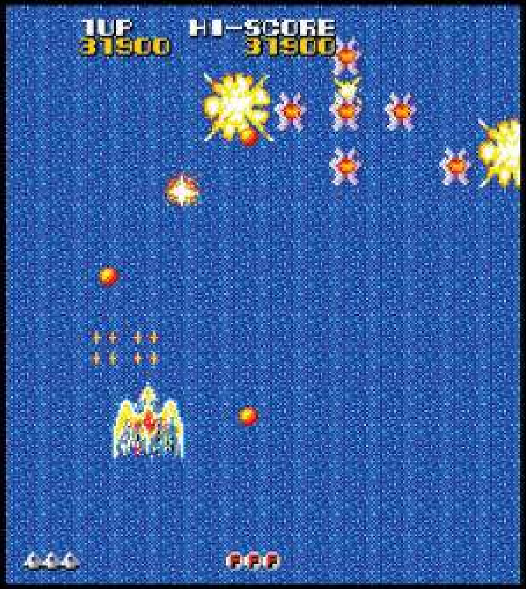
The thing is though, I couldn't work out how to actually make the ship transform. I knew you had to shoot the fifth hangar (ship parts are locked down until you free them) but the few times I was able to reach it, all I got was a lousy single ship part. Of course, what I didn't know then (due to the cabinet in our local arcade being Japanese) was that you have to have all five ship parts in order to turn into a phoenix and gain invulnerability for eight precious seconds.

This is easier said than done, because *Terra Cresta* is a challenging game that punishes careless play. Enemies come at you in clever waves and sometimes configurations will change based on where your ship is positioned. They'll often change their velocity too, which can also catch you out and you'll often blunder into them as a result.

You'll stick with it though, as *Terra Cresta* is a fantastic evolution of *Moon Cresta*, keeping the multi-ship aspect but cleverly expanding it so that you can now detach your ship parts and create different weapons based on what parts you've collected. Hell, you can even see the DNA of Nichibutsu's later game *Armed Formation F* in it, which is also in Hamster's range. It has taken me 37 long years but I've finally unlocked *Terra Cresta*'s phoenix while hammering the online leaderboards. Needless to say I'm rather chuffed with myself. ✱







TOMMY TALLARICO

» The crazy tunes that feature in the first three games are courtesy of Tommy.

DAVID PERRY

» Programming was just one of David's roles on the original *Earthworm Jim*.

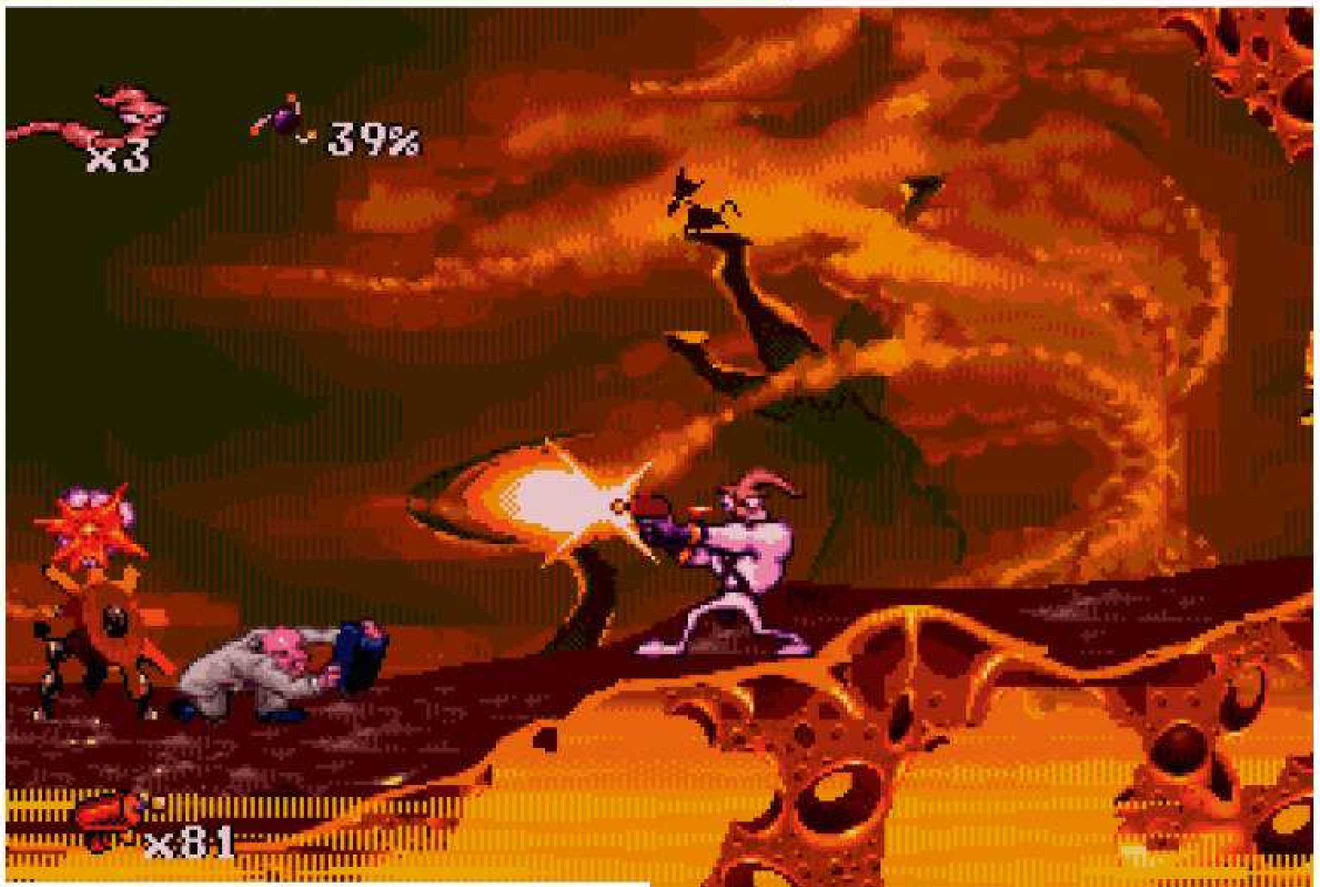
NICK BRUTY

» Nick did graphics and design work on the Sega *Earthworm Jim* games.

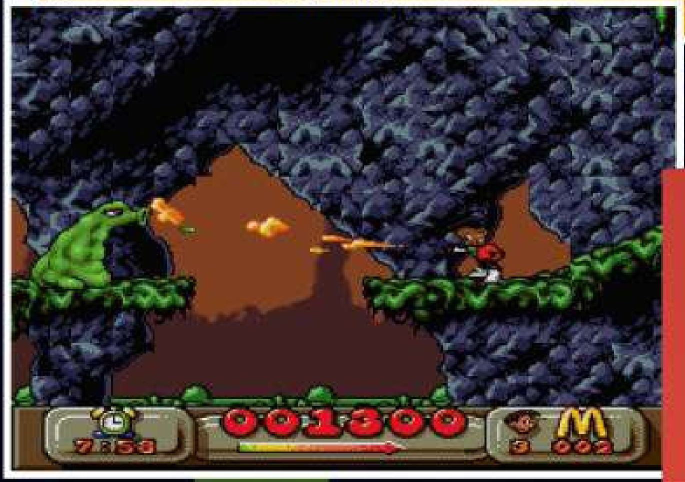
THE EVOLUTION OF EARTHWORM JIM

Having made a string of hits for Virgin Interactive, a number of its developers left to form Shiny Entertainment. David Perry, Nick Bruty and Tommy Tallarico discuss Earthworm Jim, the series it led to and their new efforts to continue the series

WORDS BY RORY MILNE



» [Mega Drive] Doug TenNapel suggested *Earthworm Jim*'s hellish What The Heck? level should be plagued by lawyers!



» [Mega Drive] *Earthworm Jim* was clearly influenced by *Global Gladiators*' open-world platforming and ranged weapons.

> **"TEX AVERY WAS A BIG INSPIRATION TO THE ANIMATION TEAM. THE ANIMATORS HAD HIS LASERDISCS PLAYING ALL THE TIME WITH JOHNNY CASH IN THE BACKGROUND"**
> ***DAVID PERRY***

No matter how much freedom the creators of a licensed game are given, their design must include certain elements and avoid using others. Virgin Interactive's in-house development team walked this line for several years during the Nineties, producing hits like *Global Gladiators*, *Cool Spot* and *Disney's Aladdin*. Virgin's musician on these titles was Tommy Tallarico, who remembers the experience as a pleasure rather than a chore. "We worked on a string of amazing games there," Tommy reviews. "I think it just goes to show how gelled the team really was, and how important the friendships we all had were. We were pretty much all single guys at the time, in our early to mid-20s, and we just wanted to make great videogames. No one ever asked us to work late or work on the weekends; we just did. We were just so excited to be creating something that we felt was so special – with each one of those games."

But however good things were at Virgin, the massive success of *Aladdin* convinced several of its in-house development team to part ways with their employer and form Shiny Entertainment. They hoped to work on another big licence, but as artist/designer Nick Bruty explains, things didn't quite go to plan. "When we left Virgin to start Shiny we were hoping to convince Disney to give us *The Lion King* licence to follow up *Aladdin*," Nick remembers. "But Disney stuck with Virgin, so that left us in search of a new licence or an original property for our first game. Doug TenNapel had joined Virgin shortly before we left, and Mike Dietz – our animation director – suggested we meet with Doug, because he was working on his own original character creations."

A lack of licensed alternatives to *The Lion King* soon led to Nick and Shiny founder David Perry doing just that, as the former coder recalls. "We just couldn't find a licensed project we were excited by," David notes. "But Doug was interviewing and we got to see Earthworm Jim, and that's what not only got him hired but also pulled us away from licensed games. He drew Professor Monkey-For-A-Head, and I thought it was so funny, probably the most insane character I'd ever seen. If our game wasn't starring Earthworm Jim I'd have wanted to make a Professor Monkey-For-A-Head game!"

The professor would still appear in Shiny's debut, however, as would many of Doug's other creations, including one that Nick remembers the artist pitching at his interview. "Dave and I had just been looking over

▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

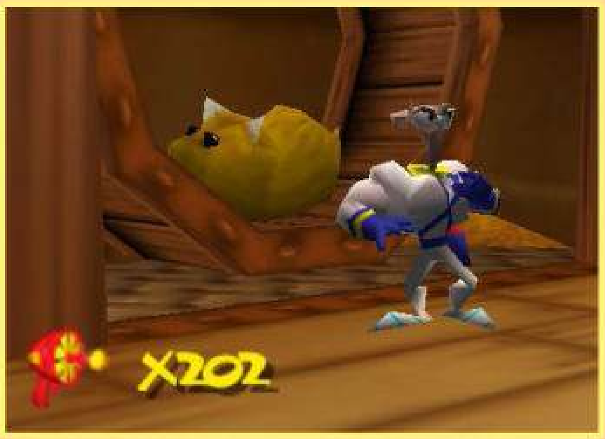
EARTHWORM JIM 3D

THE BRAVE ATTEMPT TO TAKE JIM INTO THE THIRD DIMENSION

■ To give credit where it's due, the developers of *Earthworm Jim 3D* tried to retain everything they could from the earlier games. Jim's head whip and blaster survive the transition from 2D, for example, and the sequel's new weapons are suitably surreal – especially its Gnome Bazooka! The majority of the platforming mechanics from the original games are present too, but the trouble is that their transition into 3D just doesn't work too well, and this is exacerbated by the camera not always self-aligning itself with the direction that Jim is facing.

Much more successful is the 3D sequel's approach to humour, and although this doesn't quite nail the wildly inventive insanity of the games it tries to channel, there are certainly moments in its narrative that have you laughing out loud – Jim playing an udder like the bagpipes and riding around on an upside-down pig being just two examples! But just the fact that it *has* a narrative seems to go against the grain. If the original titles had storylines then they were really beside the point, and they certainly didn't put their gameplay on hold so that non-player characters could advance their plots.

Earthworm Jim 3D does look the part in terms of its depictions of the returning cast, however, and its new characters don't look out of place, but its focus on collecting numerous marbles and killing off endless foot soldiers isn't nearly as much fun as taking a trip through the crazy and eclectic levels of the original games.



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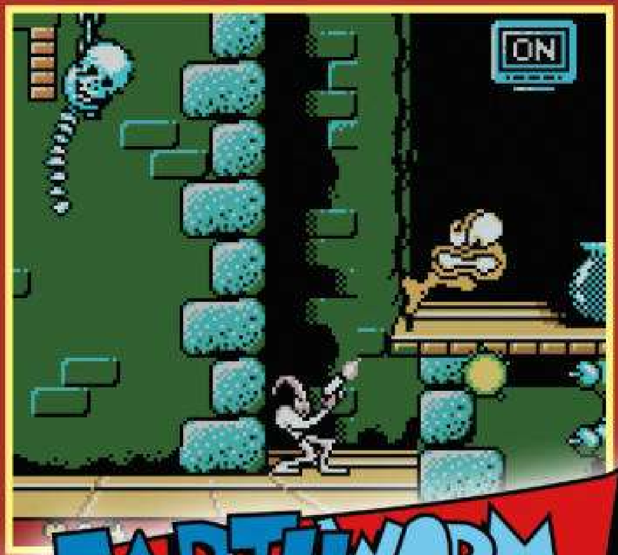


EARTHWORM JIM MENACE 2 THE GALAXY

THE HANDHELD SYSTEM EXCLUSIVE THAT FELL SHORT

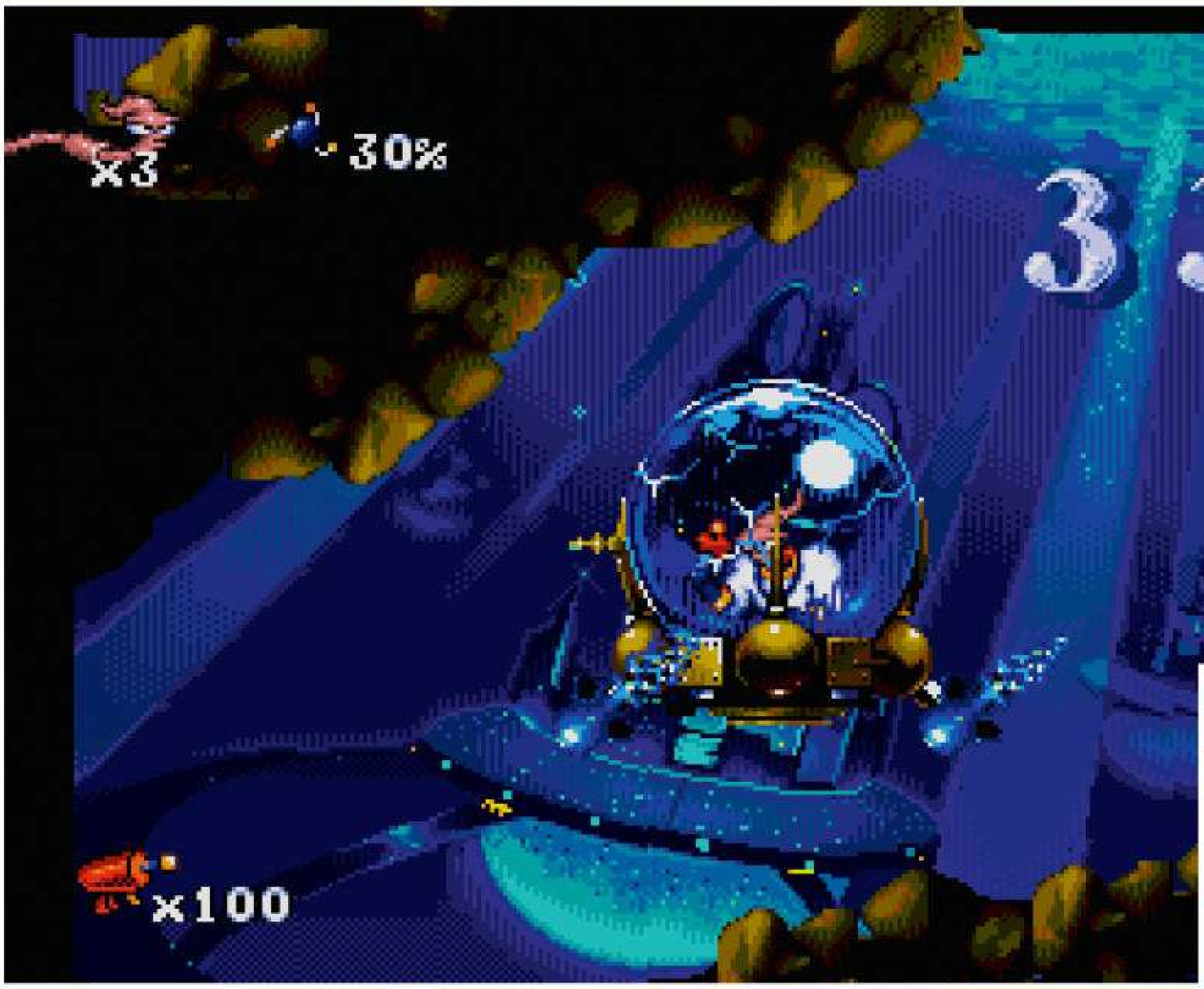
■ It's far from a bad game, but *Earthworm Jim: Menace 2 The Galaxy* could have easily been based around any number of franchises; there's just nothing about it that's uniquely *Earthworm Jim*. That said, it does have bosses from the original titles, and battles with the likes of Bob The Goldfish are by far the most original aspect of the Game Boy Color sequel.

Otherwise, *Menace 2 The Galaxy* is a collect-a-thon, with much of the time spent bouncing between platforms in search of what look like giant doughnuts. Occasionally you use your blaster to dispatch level-themed foes – little green men in its space level, science experiments in its lab level and so on, but otherwise your goal is to collect things.

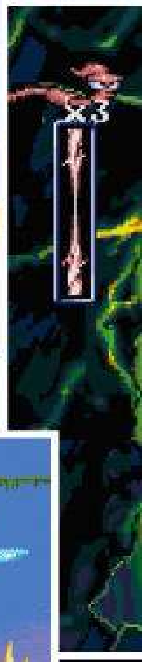
In terms of interactive features, the handheld sequel better reflects its predecessors. There are zip lines straight out of the first game, and ropes suspended over steep falls that mirror the original's hanging chains. You can even blast your way along some in reference to the mechanics of the original, which is a nice touch.

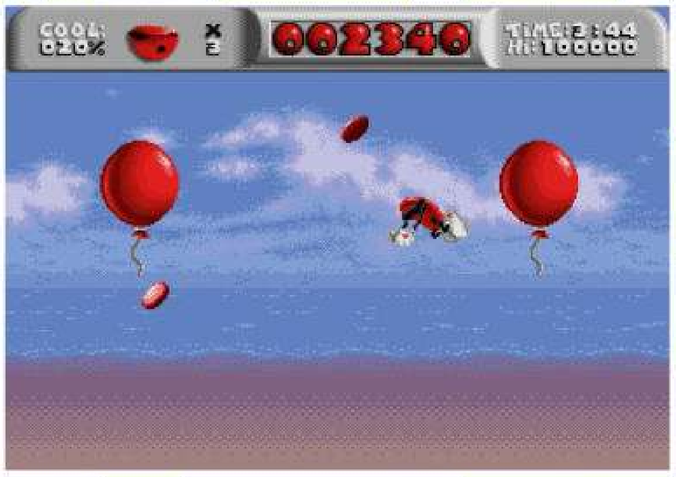
The Game Boy Color title's levels aren't the most imaginative, but there are nods to the humour of the original games – such as Jim warping between sections by jumping down toilets, and bouncing on sheep to reach higher areas. Although these sorts of surreal diversions are few and far between.

In the main, *Earthworm Jim: Menace 2 The Galaxy* involves hopping from platform to platform, which is a real shame given the potential of the licence.

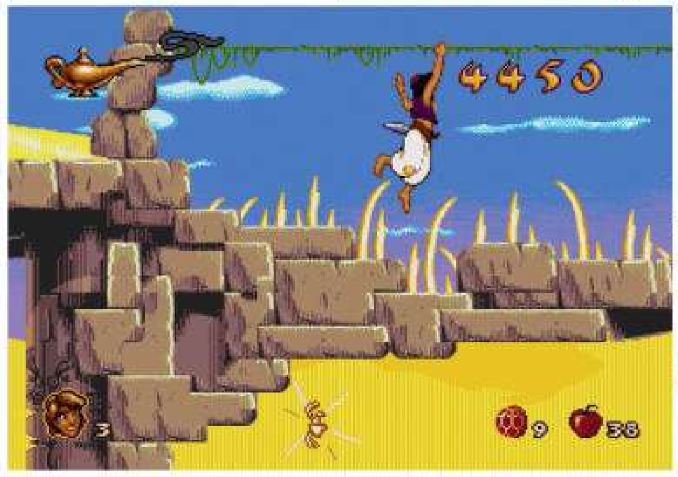


» [Mega Drive] *Earthworm Jim*'s submarine maze race is just one of the game's seriously tricky challenges.

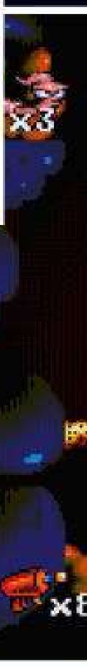


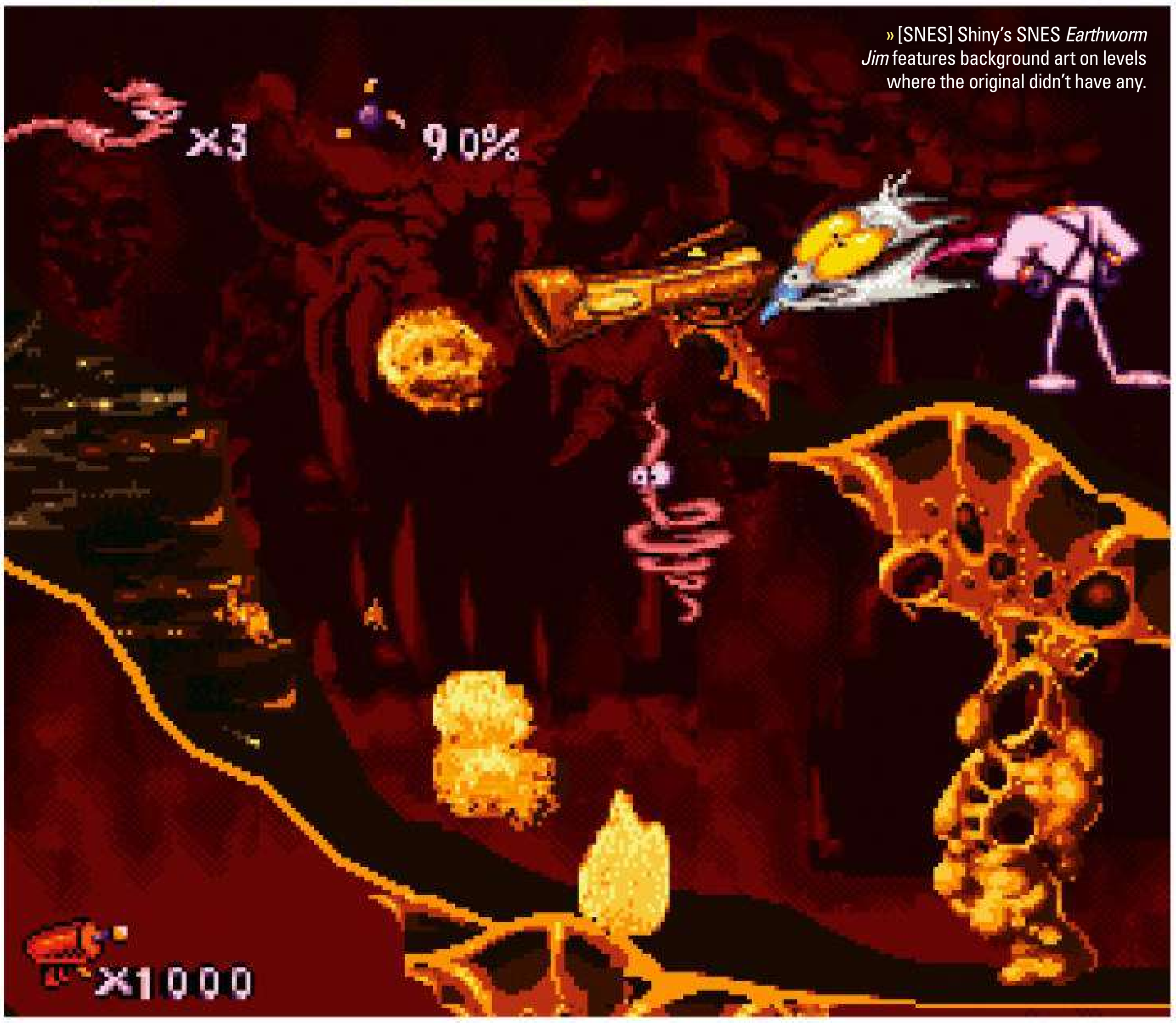


» [Mega Drive] Jumping between balloons in *Cool Spot* led to swinging between hooks in *Earthworm Jim*.



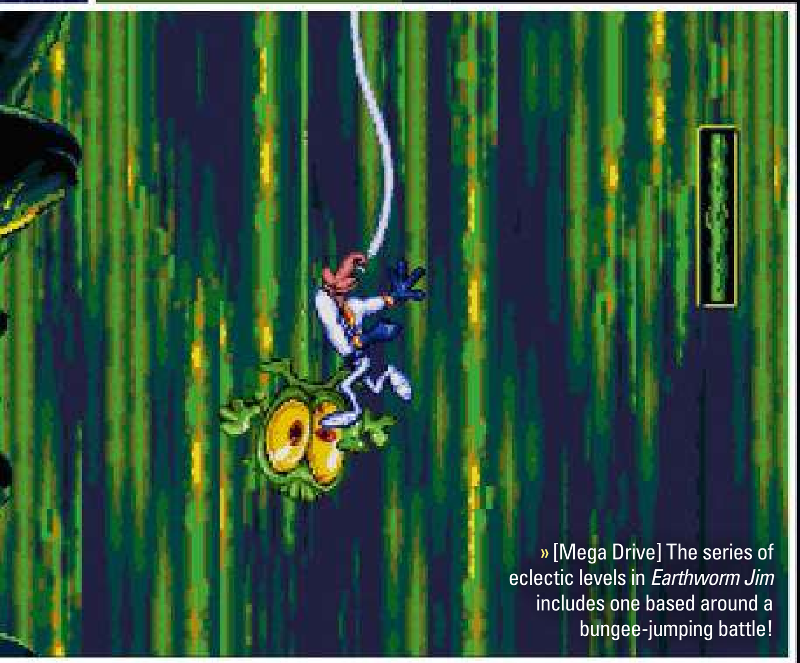
» [Mega Drive] Where *Aladdin* has suspended vines, *Earthworm Jim* has chains strung between platforms to negotiate.



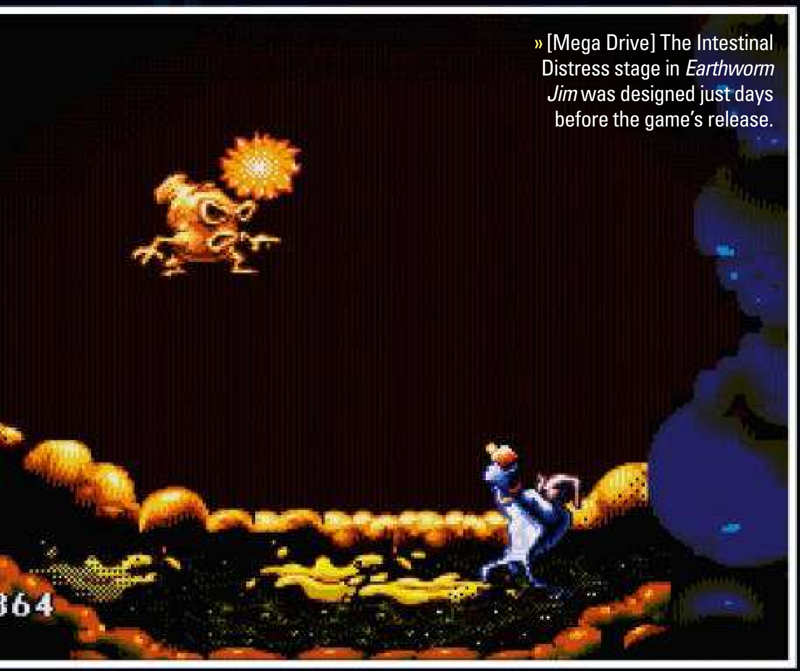


» [SNES] Shiny's SNES *Earthworm Jim* features background art on levels where the original didn't have any.

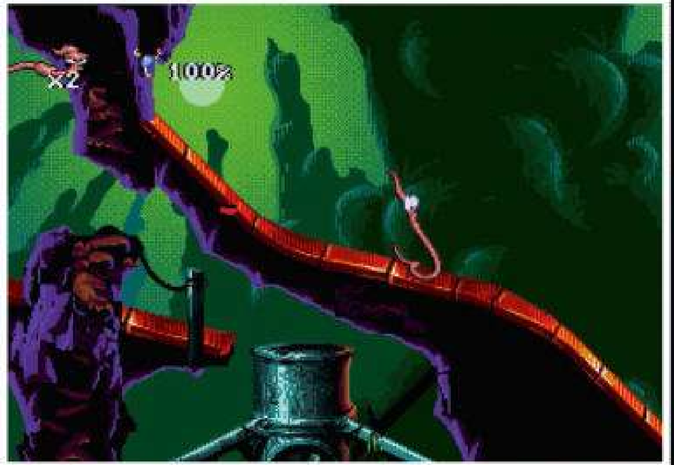
» The original *Earthworm Jim* team, many of whom are working on the new Amico title.



» [Mega Drive] The series of eclectic levels in *Earthworm Jim* includes one based around a bungee-jumping battle!



» [Mega Drive] The Intestinal Distress stage in *Earthworm Jim* was designed just days before the game's release.



» [Mega-CD] The extended New Junk City level in *Earthworm Jim Special Edition* sees Jim stripped naked.

licensed IPs from a Hollywood agent, and they were all rather dreadful," Nick sighs. "Then Doug showed us a single image of Jim, and we were sold instantly. Jim really was a perfect videogame character. I think Doug had about three or four other characters in place by then too. I remember falling in love with Evil The Cat, so I made sure his was the first level I'd be working on."

Of course, Doug's character sketches had to be animated for Shiny's game, and David remembers two very different artists influencing his animators. "Tex Avery was a big inspiration to the animation team," David acknowledges. "That style of animation was really funny, like when someone got punched and their whole head turned into a U shape! Back then, the animators had his Laserdiscs playing all the time with Johnny Cash music in the background. That combo ended up making them do crazy stuff!"

In keeping with Earthworm Jim's cartoon-inspired physical humour, Shiny's character was made to sound equally amusing, thanks to the project's musician Tommy Tallarico. "We were all asking what sort of voice Jim should have," Tommy ponders, "so I said I thought it would be funny if he had this Southern drawl, and make him this back-town kind of guy that went, 'Gr-oo-vy! Yeah! Woo-hoo!' I said to Doug that we ought to have him as the voice, because he's quite the comedian. One thing we thought would be good was if Jim always stated the obvious. Like he got a manta power-up, and just said, 'Mant-a!' Or he got a gun and said, 'Plas-ma!'"

> "WE NEVER HAD A GAME DESIGN. WHERE WE STARTED WAS WITH THE HUMOUR, AND THAT DICTATED HOW WE MADE THE GAME"
> *TOMMY TALLARICO*

Given the Shiny team's track record, it's unsurprising that they broadly designed *Earthworm Jim* as a platformer, although their approach was decidedly ad hoc. "We had just come off making *Aladdin* for Disney on the Sega Genesis, so we were very interested in making more platform games," David enthuses. "The challenge was that we didn't have a design document, so instead we used the, 'That feels good', 'That would be funny if…' strategy, and it worked out nicely. It meant the game didn't get stale as it was *impossible* to know what was coming next."

After working with so many licences, Nick viewed *Earthworm Jim* as a breath of fresh air, although he saw an upside to his team's previous projects all being platformers. "With *Jim* we were free to do what we wanted," Nick beams. "We had just made a series of licensed titles, and as you might imagine there wasn't a whole lot of artistic freedom when working with publishers like Disney. But having made numerous platformers, Dave's game engine was very robust, so it was fun just trying to push it in new directions. The smaller levels were interesting to work on, as you could use up all the memory on just one to two screens worth of play."

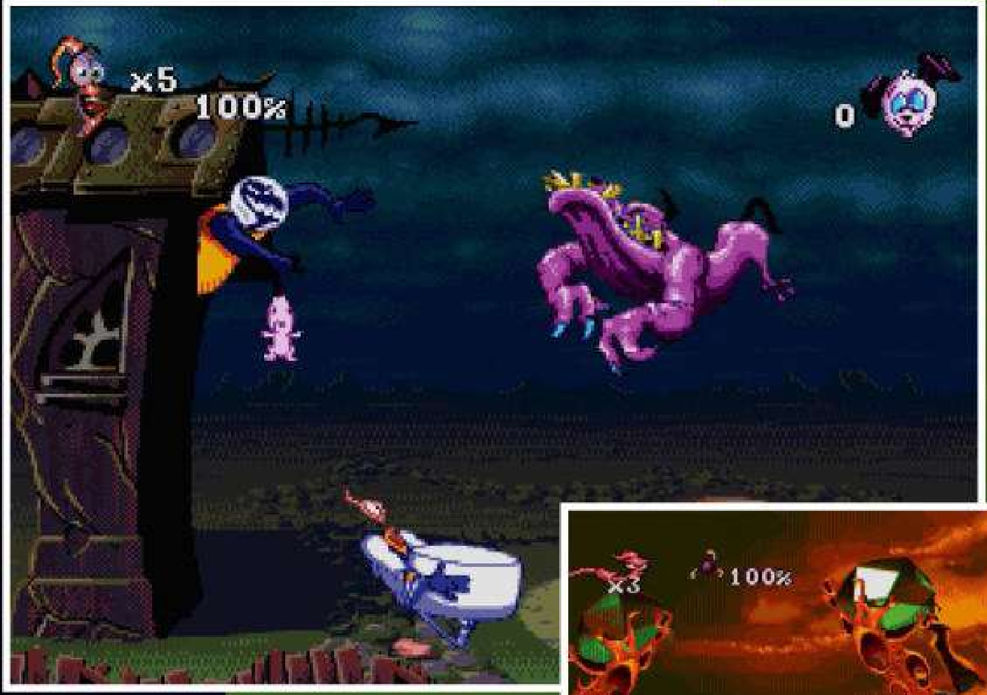
The design of *Earthworm Jim*'s opening level certainly pushed David's engine, but as he points out, Shiny stopped short of making its junkyard boss Chuck edible! "Over the years, I had found a pretty cool way to make games, where you had your own programming language running inside the game engine. That meant any object could do just about anything, so you could have Chuck driving equipment, or you could have a sandwich doing it! It was insanely flexible, so it really just needed crazy ideas, and we had plenty of those."

The crazy ideas fuelling *Earthworm Jim*'s design came out of the Shiny team joking around, and as Tommy recollects, taking the joke too far was all part of the process. "We never had a game design. Where we started was with the humour, and that dictated how we made the game. So I remember somebody saying it would be funny if we launched a chicken up in the air! Then maybe it would be funnier if it was something that didn't fly. So what if we had something heavy fall and launch a cow up in the air? How about an old refrigerator? What if we were in a junkyard? Boom! So the gag came first, and as we talked it through the level came together."

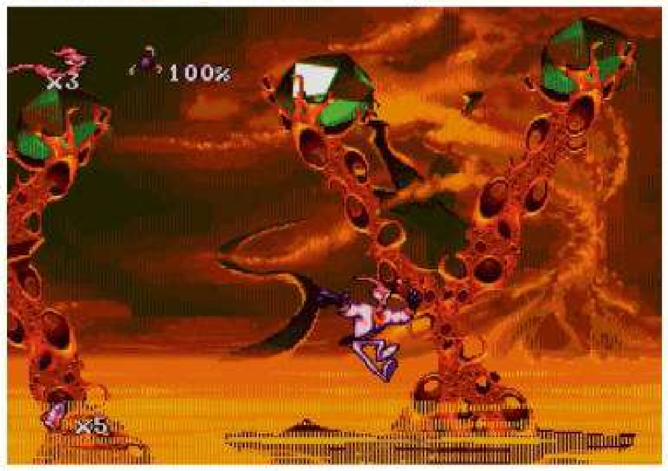
On bringing these discussions to life on the screen, Nick describes the task as building compelling environments around the aesthetics of Doug TenNapel's character designs. "Since Doug had most of the characters in place by the time we met, what we added was really the surrounding world of the game. We were really just trying to come up with what would be interesting levels – something different for players to see. We would discuss certain points within them, where we were going to have end-bosses and what characters we were going to have. So the background artists were also the game designers, it all went hand in hand back then."

In the same way that *Earthworm Jim*'s levels complemented Doug's crazy characters, the music Tommy selected for the stages reflected their wacky objectives. "When you first saw the Andy Asteroids level Jim was riding on his rocket through space, and any normal person would make it sound like *Star Wars* – or have techno music or something. But what would be funnier, because he was from the South, was to play banjo music! For Heck – Evil The Cat, I used Mussorgsky's *Night On Bald Mountain*, the joke being that when it got really serious I did a record scratch, where Evil The Cat played elevator music to torture you!"

As well as a gag soundtrack, *Earthworm Jim*'s hellish second level ended up with eclectic opponents, and thanks to Nick some

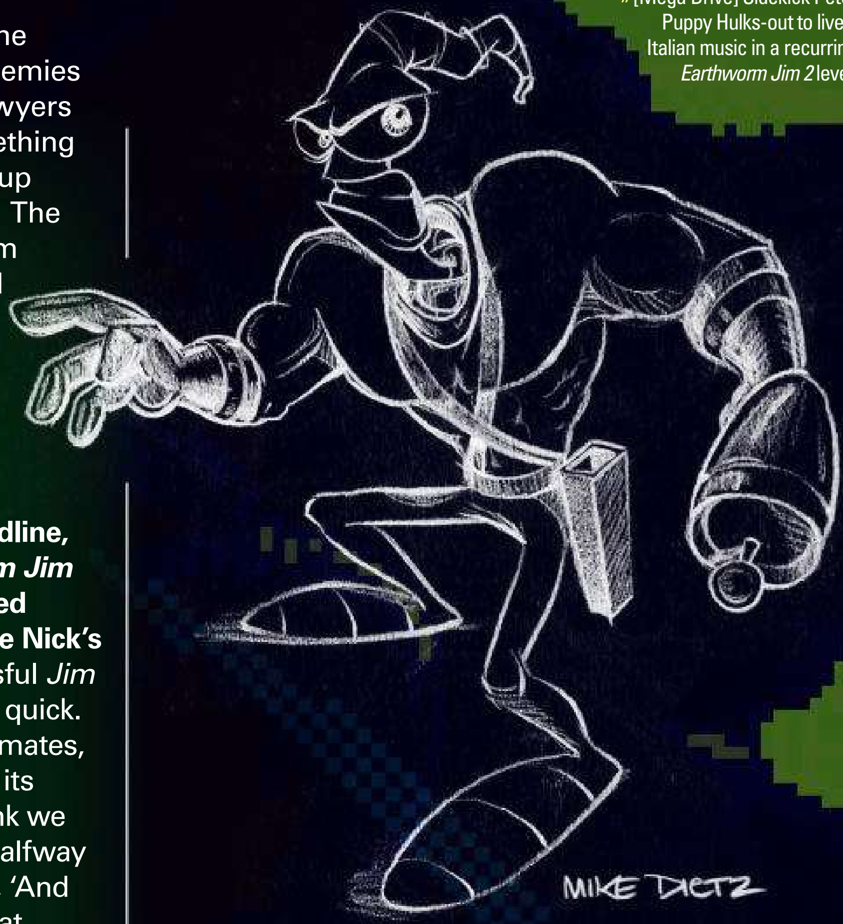


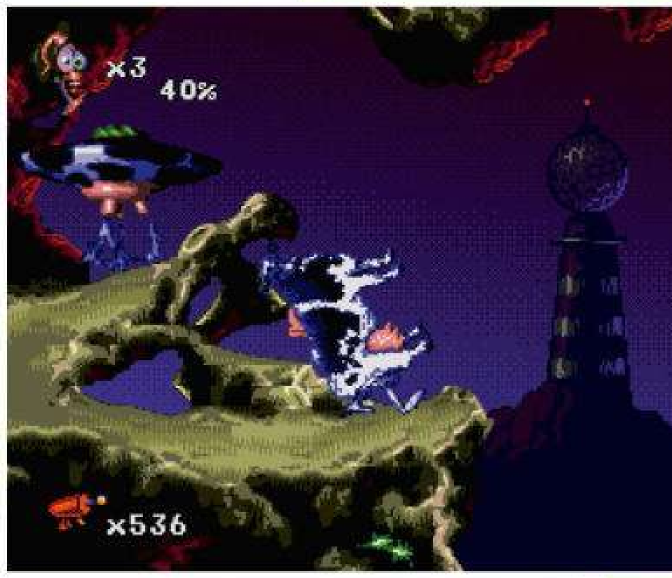
» [Mega Drive] Sidekick Peter Puppy Hulks-out to lively Italian music in a recurring *Earthworm Jim 2* level.



» [Mega-CD] *Earthworm Jim Special Edition*'s What The Heck? stage is bigger than the original's.

quite unusual modes of transport. "The animators would often come up with enemies – I think it was Doug who wanted the lawyers for Heck, but then I felt we needed something flying around the open areas and came up with the black smokey things with teeth. The animators were busy, so I animated them myself. At the time I was playing around with 3D rendering, and I made the spinning jewels, which eventually turned into elevators. So a lot of things just kind of got thrown in due to the short development time."





» [Mega Drive] Cows are Shiny's mascot, so Jim carrying them around in *Earthworm Jim 2* makes perfect sense!

In addition to working to a tight deadline, Shiny received word that *Earthworm Jim* would be expected to support related projects, which was enough to make Nick's head spin. "We didn't know how successful *Jim* was going to be, and it was all very, very quick. We were working with a publisher – Playmates, who was initially funding it, and this was its first videogame. It was like, 'Hey! We think we can make this into a toy line!' That was halfway through *Earthworm Jim*. Then it was like, 'And we're going to do a TV show, because that will promote the toy line.' So everything was happening all at the same time, and we didn't get a chance to catch our breath."

Although not the only level designer on *Earthworm Jim*, Nick did create the lion's share, which included a last minute effort that left him exhausted and on-edge. "I handled a lot of the levels, especially at the end where Sega asked for a new one days before we were going to publish. That made it a really mad scramble at the end there. The last level I did – Intestinal Distress – I made that in a day and a half, and I played through it maybe twice before it went off, so I was a nervous wreck over that and I'm just amazed that anyone actually got through it."

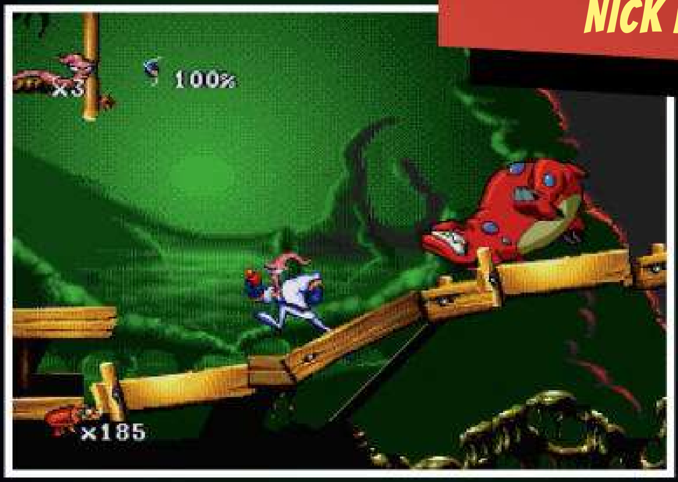
"OUR PUBLISHER WANTED TO STRIKE WHILE THE IRON WAS HOT, AND TO RELEASE THE CD VERSION WITH A WHOLE NEW LEVEL"
NICK BRUTY

Players got their first chance to play Intestinal Distress when *Earthworm Jim* debuted at a US trade show, and thanks to a friend of Nick's this was a huge success. "Playmates was showing *Jim* for the first time, but it just had a tiny little monitor – you couldn't even see it! But we had a friend who had his own stand. We were telling him how disappointed we were, and he was like, 'Do you want some of my space?' So we went out and rented a rear-projection TV and got hold of a Genesis, and hooked up *Earthworm Jim properly*. That was the first time we got a sense of how people responded to the game, and that was a real buzz!"

Soon after, Playmates asked Shiny for a Mega-CD version – *Earthworm Jim Special Edition*, to include extended stages and a new level, the design of which fell to Nick. "I consider the Mega-CD version to be the best version," Nick beams. "Our publisher wanted to strike while the iron was hot, and to release the CD version with a whole new level. I was kind of hoping that would fall to someone else, as I had just come up with Intestinal Distress. I didn't have a start point or an idea in mind when I started working on it. I just kind of mindlessly drew some planks of wood, and it grew from there like the ramshackle level it was."

More a product of evolution than the end result of team meetings, Nick's exclusive Mega-CD level was given a boss that its animators named after the stage's designer. "It started to look like a crazy assault course, and I thought it might be cool if you were chased. I asked the animators for a slobbering monster that you had to tease to come after you. I think they were also short of ideas, and they named the creature Big Bruty. I could say that I was thinking of the game as a whole when designing this, but looking back it feels quite different, kind of creepy. And that's OK."

Given the urgency for *Earthworm Jim Special Edition*, it's no wonder that it just had one new level. With more time, David imagines it would have had various new stages.



» [Mega-CD] The Big Bruty stage was especially created for *Earthworm Jim Special Edition* by Nick Bruty.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

EARTHWORM JIM PSP

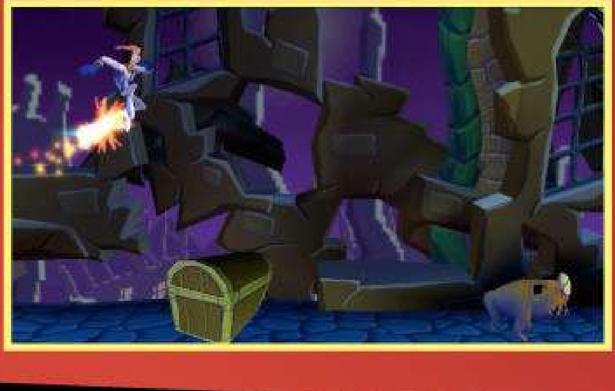
THE CANCELLED REBOOT WITH SUPER SUIT UPGRADES

■ Rather than the dream sequel planned by the creators of the original *Earthworm Jim* game, the half-finished PSP iteration was put together by an internal Shiny team, long after its founders had left the formerly prestigious firm.

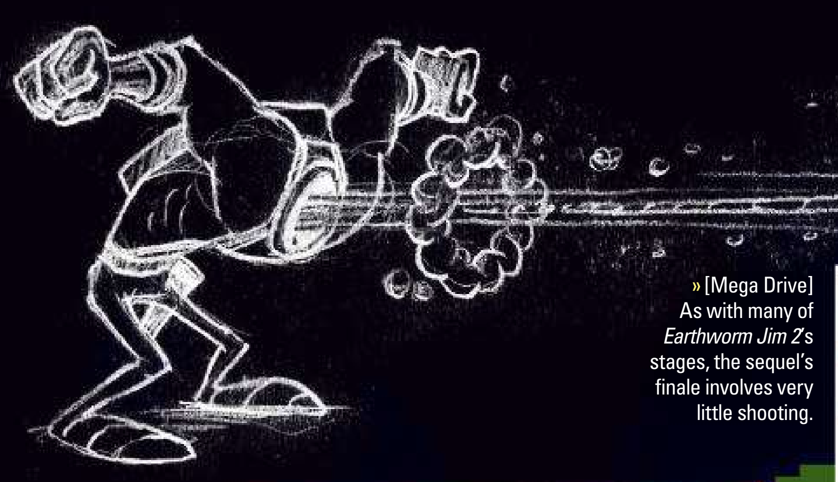
The one fully completed level from the reboot is a return to New Junk City, where Jim is given a gem-collecting sidequest and an upgradeable super suit. The new abilities it offers him include being able to stick to the sides of platforms by the soles of his boots, run fast along conveyor belts against their direction of travel and fly short distances using jets built into his footwear. Jim's enhanced exoskeleton is also far stretchier than before, which allows him to squeeze through narrow spaces.

His trusty blaster is much like it was in the original games, but the portable PlayStation title boasts a new head whip move, where Jim's suit swings the hapless worm around and around, battering everything in his path as he goes!

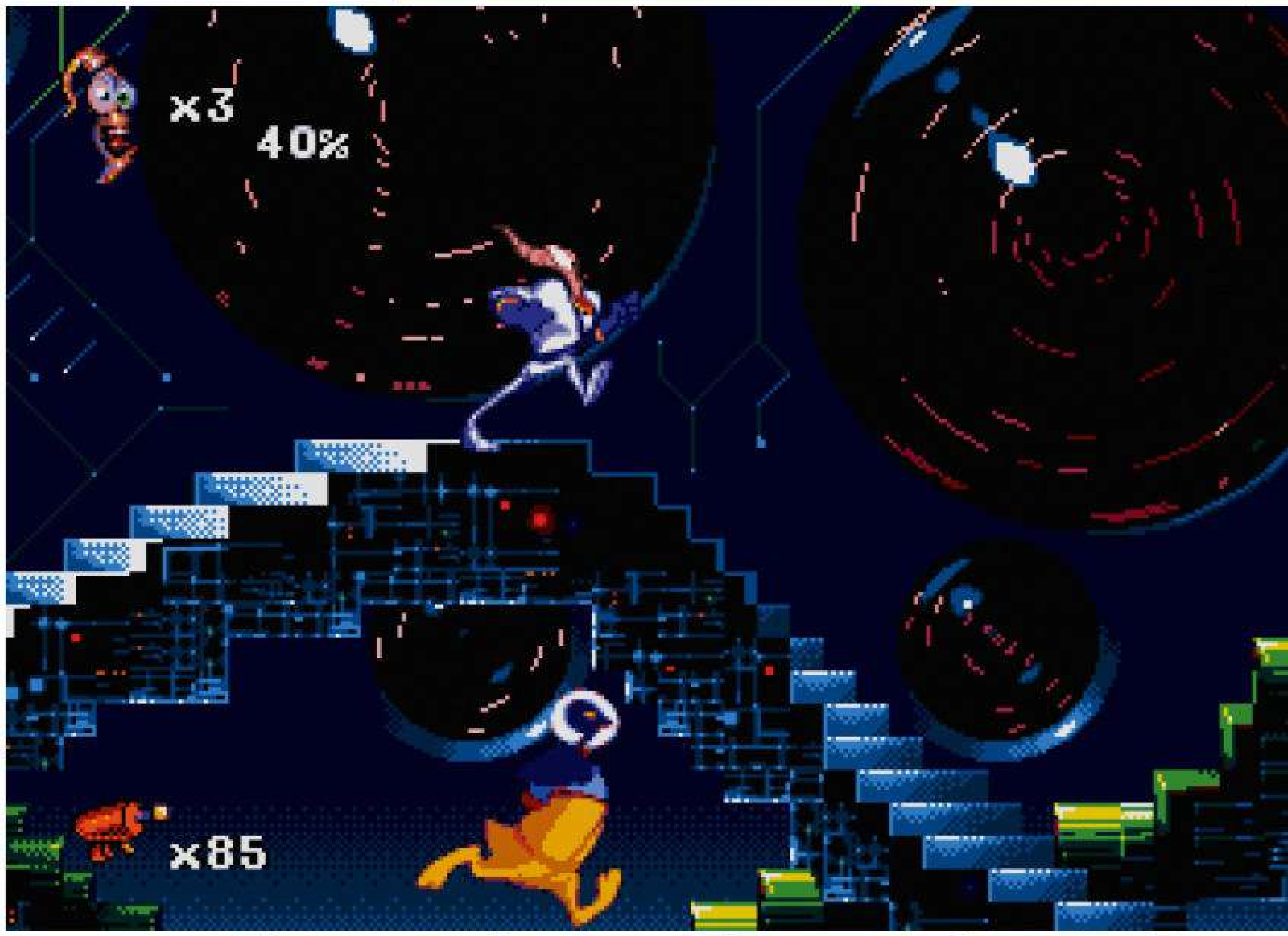
The partially completed PSP title brings the crows back from the original's New Junk City, although they have cybernetic cranial implants for some reason. The junkyard dogs from Jim's debut also make a reappearance, and they've been taught the new trick of spinning around like mini tornados. Billy The Bin makes his return in the PSP title too, although the boss is less cartoony than he was in the first *Earthworm Jim* game, which is true of the general approach to the unfinished and unreleased PSP outing.



MIKE DIETZ



» [Mega Drive] As with many of *Earthworm Jim 2*'s stages, the sequel's finale involves very little shooting.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

EARTHWORM JIM HD

THE HD REMAKE WITH EXTRA CONTENT AND A MULTIPLAYER MODE

■ There's not a lot to say about the HD *Earthworm Jim*'s take on the original's levels. They're rendered in a higher resolution, obviously, and then whether they look nicer or not is in the eye of the beholder. They play exactly the same, aside from giving you pre-level hints and in-game arrows that point you in the direction you should be going. Other than that, the bosses in the HD remake's versions of the original game's stages have on-screen health meters, which the original lacked.

More interesting are the new levels in the HD adaptation, the more successful of which are the multiplayer ones. Each one is set in one of the environments from the original game, but with entirely different layouts and fresh challenges designed to encourage co-op play. They're best described as chaotic fun, and this is at least partly because they borrow mechanics from the original game's levels. But the clever way that the camera in the two-to-four player challenges pans in and out depending on how close or far away players are from each other definitely helps.

The new single-player stages in the HD game are set inside a games console, and these feature both fresh mechanics and some from the original game. New opponents include a keyboard-playing cat, a jetpack-wearing granny and a swarm of locusts!

Purists may prefer the original game's visuals, but the HD update's new solo levels and multiplayer mode make it a must-play title – if only it hadn't been taken offline.

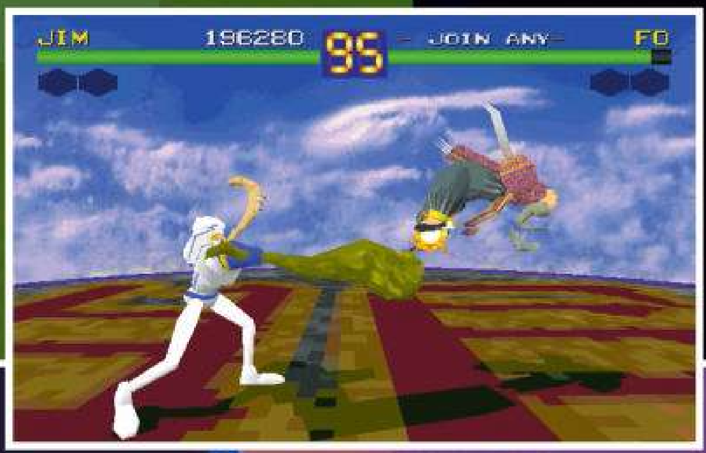
"EARTHWORM JIM 2 WAS MUCH MORE RANDOM AND LOOSE. IT WAS INTERESTING IN ITS OWN RIGHT, BUT IT DIDN'T FEEL LIKE A SINGULAR VISION"
NICK BRUTY

▶ "I liked a nice mix of platform levels, and then minigame levels. The minigames were more fun to develop – like the underwater glass submarines. It was also fun to add memorable moments – like riding the giant hamster. So given more time I'd have wanted to add a mix of all three of those."

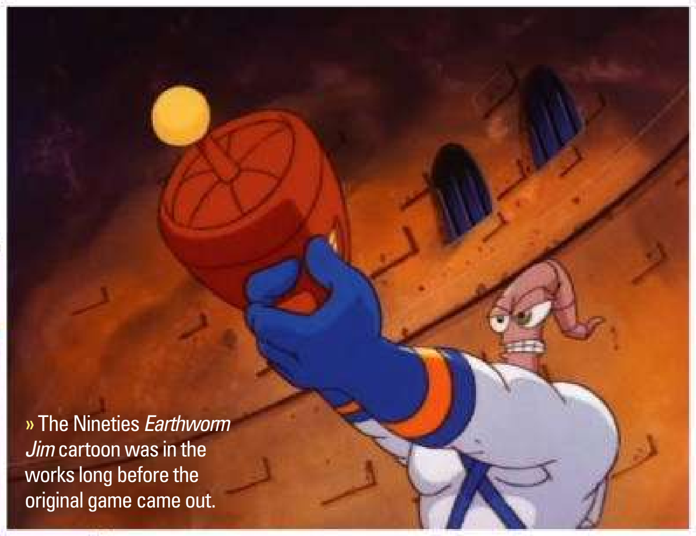
As things turned out, not only was there no time to give *Special Edition* more new stages, but Shiny also went straight on from getting it shipped to making *Earthworm Jim 2*. "It's a shame we didn't have more time," Nick reflects. "Not necessarily for development itself, but just to have a creative break for a while so we could hit the sequel feeling fresh – especially as this ended up being our last 16-bit title. So I'm not sure why the push was there for a quick turnaround on *Earthworm Jim 2*."

Naturally, there was commercial pressure to release the follow-up, but David offers an additional reason for rolling on from one *Earthworm Jim* game to the next. "When you had a team of people that were used to making games *fast*, they couldn't just sit around. They were bubbling with ideas, and just needed to keep going. It didn't feel like work, we were happy to experiment with ideas, and when it felt right we just kept moving forward."

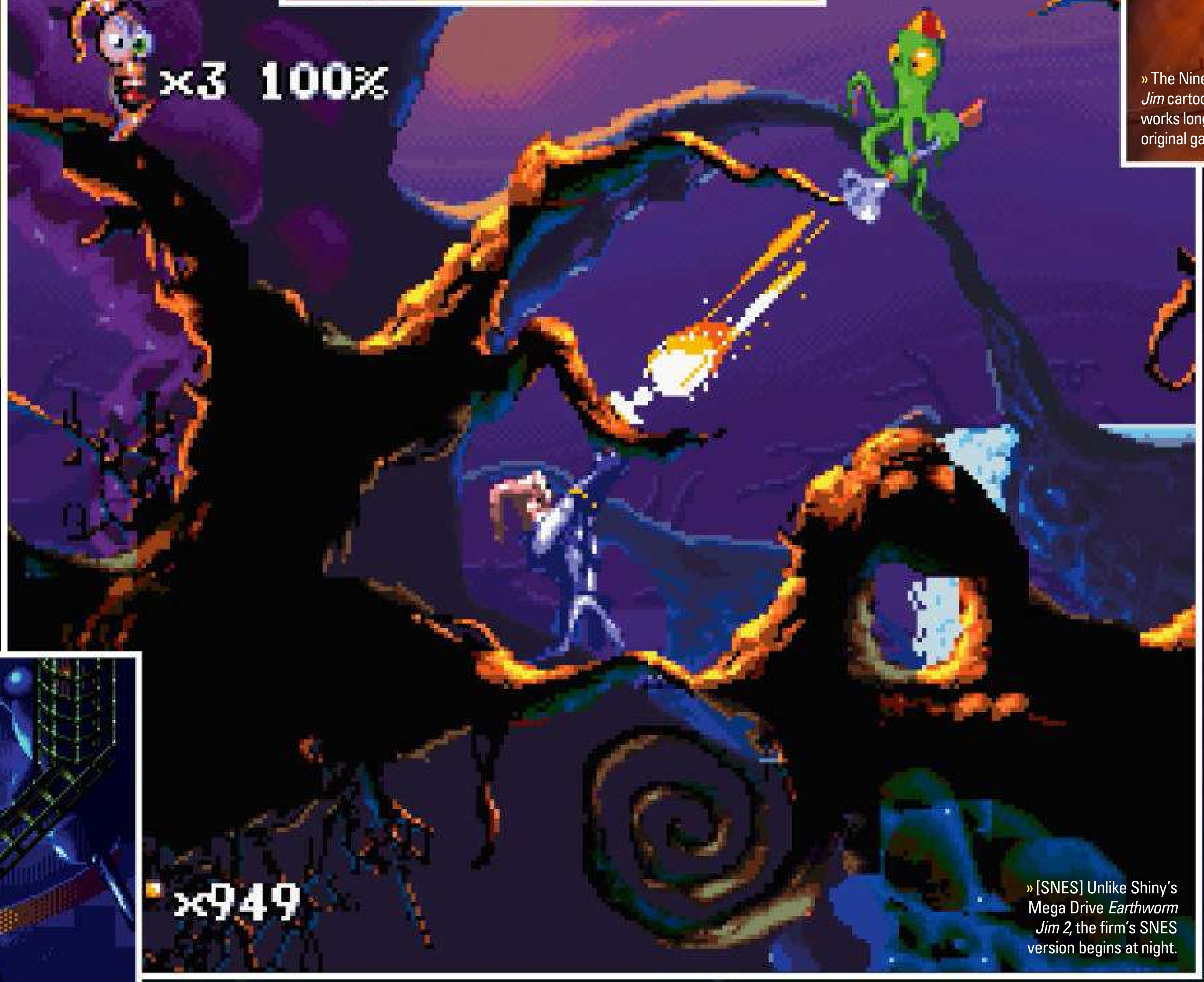
Earthworm Jim had certainly been full of experimental ideas, but the stages being imagined for its follow-up upped the ante, with one being based around carrying cows! "We liked the game to be a roller-coaster," David



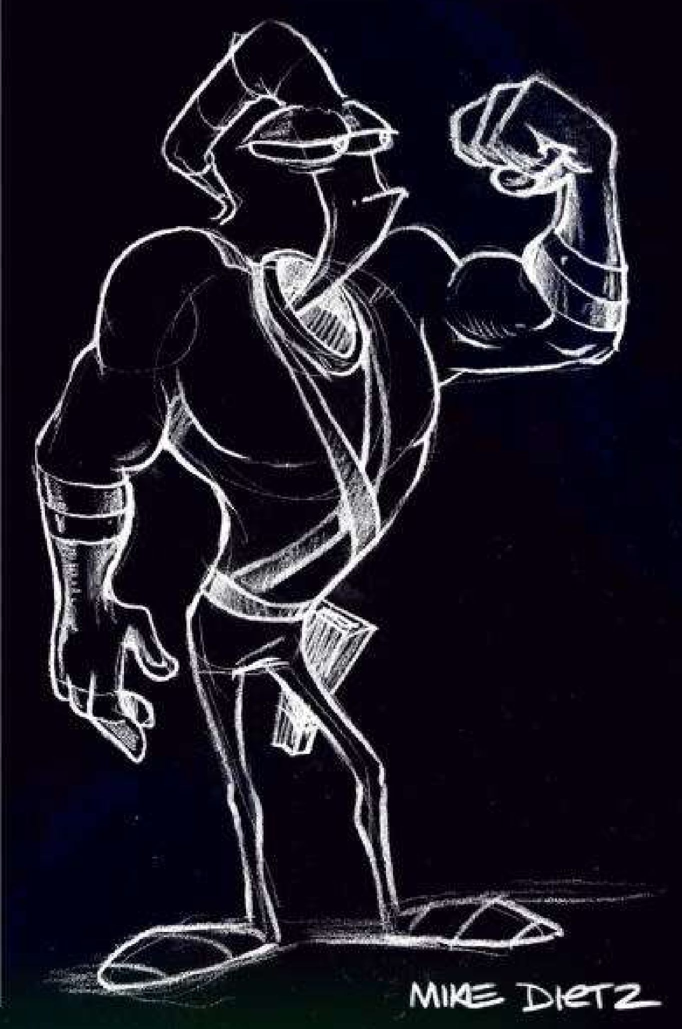
» [PC] It's worth beating the PC *Battle Arena Toshinden* in order to unlock Earthworm Jim as a fighter.



» The Nineties *Earthworm Jim* cartoon was in the works long before the original game came out.



» [SNES] Unlike Shiny's Mega Drive *Earthworm Jim 2*, the firm's SNES version begins at night.



considers, "so there was running, shooting, new control systems, weapons, and of course you ended up as a defenceless naked worm at times. The goal was to keep the gamer on their toes. Cows were the mascot of Shiny, so they could be included anywhere and that would be just fine. Moo!"

The soundtrack for *Earthworm Jim 2* was Tommy's attempt to outdo its predecessor, in that he wanted to have even funnier music in the sequel than he had in the original. "You know what the *Earthworm Jim* games were? It was ten guys in a room trying to make each other laugh every day. So I'd use polka music or carnival music. Or we'd be in a dark cave, and I'd use Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*! Italian music is kind of funny – you wouldn't expect that! So *La Tarantella*, *Funiculì Funiculà*, I did a kind of combination of those two. I started thinking, 'Oh Peter Puppy's doing this, so let's put that tune in for that.'"

But while bouncing Peter Puppy around to Italian music brought fun to the follow-up, spanning multiple genres meant having fewer run-and-gun stages than the original. "There wasn't a conscious effort to have less shooting," Nick clarifies. "I just think everyone felt we needed to keep pushing boundaries, and keep things interesting for ourselves. Looking back, I wish we had more run-and-gun platform levels. It would have required more effort to make them feel fresh and creative, but I feel they're Jim's bread and butter levels."

Players' reactions reflected Nick's concerns on the sequel's release; it was a great game that fell short of Jim's first outing. Nick puts this down to its episodic nature. "The biggest problem I felt with *Earthworm Jim 2*, and all of its many gameplay styles, was that it felt less cohesive than the first one. The first game was kind of random, but it was held together by the characters: Heck was built around Evil The Cat, The Lab was built around the Professor – and so on. *Earthworm Jim 2* was much more random and loose. It was interesting in its own right, but it didn't feel like a singular vision like the first one did."

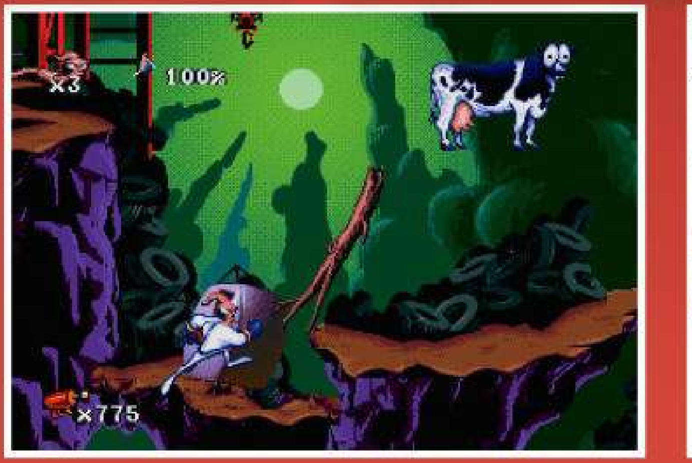
Although the Shiny team moved onto other projects after *Earthworm Jim 2* came out, the hero's animated TV show aired around this time, and he also appeared in print. "The cartoon was such an exciting step; we had a videogame, a toy line and now a TV show," David enthuses. "Doug worked closely on the creative side, and the result was funny! Then Marvel ended up doing an *Earthworm Jim* comic book series, which is now pretty rare – I saw a mint copy on eBay for $999."

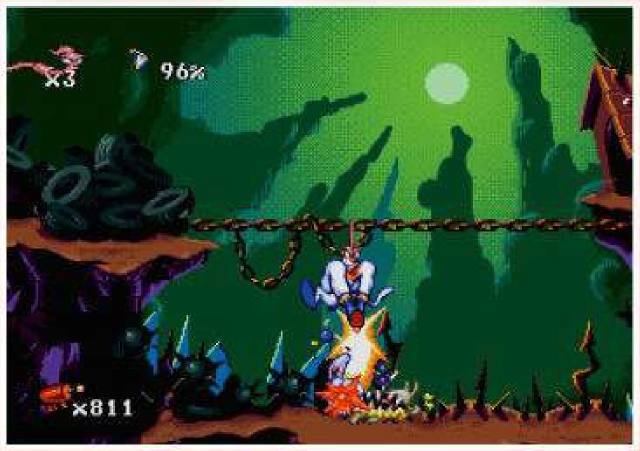
In the following years, Earthworm Jim had cameos in *Clay Fighter 63 1/3* and the DOS version of *Battle Arena Toshinden*, then in 1999 he starred in two non-Shiny titles: *Earthworm Jim 3D* and *Earthworm Jim: Menace 2 The Galaxy*. "Interplay wanted Earthworm Jim to have cameo appearances in those games, and I had no issues there. It was just for fun!" David grins. "We had no problem with other people making *Earthworm Jim* games either; we just weren't involved in them."

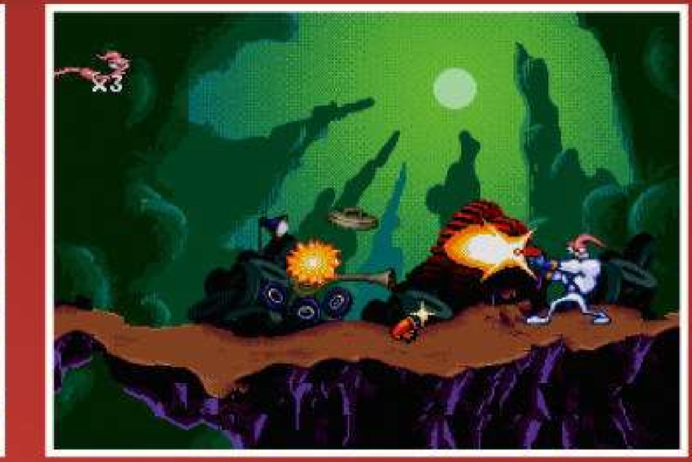
Although he left 2D design behind for polygon-based development after finishing work on *Earthworm Jim 2*, Nick felt that ▶

GROOVY GUIDE TO NEW JUNK CITY

HERE'S HOW TO BEAT THE CRAZY FIRST LEVEL OF EARTHWORM JIM







JUST FOR LAUGHS

■ Head-whip the safe near the start to launch the cow! Then jump up the tower of tyres and leap left to get to the zip line. Jump off the end and head-whip left to hook the moose, then jump up the zip lines and warp down the toilet, where you'll find plasma blasters and a handy extra life.

IT'S A WORM'S LIFE

■ If you take the shortcut in the Just For Laughs tip you meet less foes, but take out those you do meet quickly. Watch for crows attacking from above, as they attach themselves to Jim's head. The dogs are deadliest when Jim's hanging from a chain, as they tend to go for his groin!

TAKING OUT THE TRASH

■ Mini-boss Billy The Bin is an animated trash monster that likes to dance, so when he does light him up with ammo while avoiding falling trombones. When he turns into a trashcan on wheels alternate between blasting and jumping over him to avoid contact, and you'll soon put him down.

Shiny should have given its hero a trilogy. "I always had a feel about those games, not that I should compare them to Indiana Jones, but I felt like *Jim* was our *Raiders* and *Jim 2*, to me, felt like *Temple Of Doom* – so not as much fun but still good. But we never got a chance to make our *Last Crusade*, where everything would have normalised a bit and we could have attacked it with some fresh energy, so that was a little bit of unfinished business."

In 2006, that unfinished business was almost addressed, when an *Earthworm Jim* game for Sony's PSP was approved, with David and his former team on board. "I was trying to get the original *Earthworm Jim* team back together, funded by Atari. It was a thumbs-up from the key people, and so we started thinking of ideas. The problem was that Atari then told me that it couldn't fund the game. I ended up leaving Shiny, but I believe its internal staff continued to work on *Earthworm Jim PSP* for a while longer."

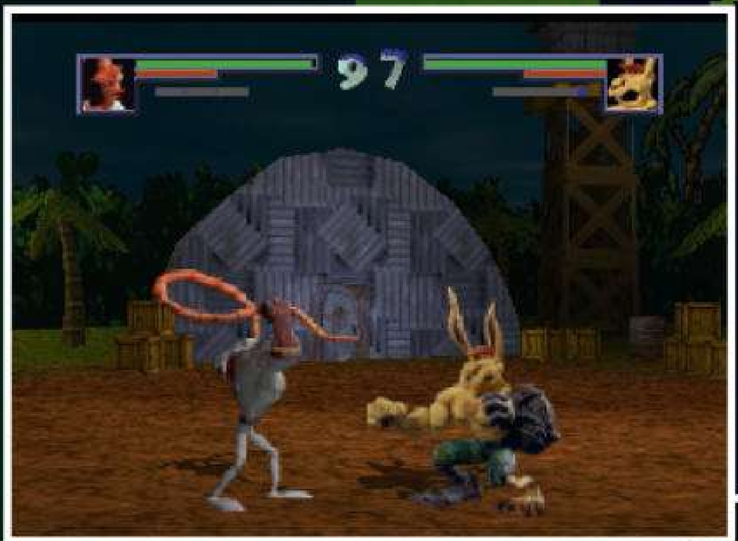
In light of his purely business role at Shiny before he left, it follows that David wouldn't have much to do with *Earthworm Jim PSP*, and as Tommy notes, the original team had no input at all. "We were trying to work on that, and we had meetings, and then it just kind of fell through with Infogrames and Atari. We gave an offer to do it for next to nothing, and they just passed on it. Then they started to do it internally, but it never came out. I think I played one level of it, and it just didn't look like *Jim*."

Following the disappointment of the PSP title, a new *Earthworm Jim* game was announced by Tommy in 2019 for his firm's Intellivision Amico console, with many of the original team signed on. "When we started designing it we thought, 'What are some of the funny situations we could do?'" Tommy muses. "Then using the touchscreen, the gyroscope, accelerometer, speaker and microphone, and having multiple players – are you kidding me?! You know, it is *really* funny! So we're designing something unique just for the Amico, and that really enhances the joke aspect of it."

Reviewing the gameplay in place so far for the in-development Amico *Earthworm Jim*, Tommy highlights its accessibility, multiplayer mode and returning characters. "One of the things with the first two games was that they were difficult, so in that regard the new game will be more accessible and a little less frustrating. But the characters will be making a return, and because of the multiplayer aspect wouldn't it be cool if you could play as some of them? So you'll get an opportunity to play as Professor Monkey-For-A-Head!"

The long wait for the original *Earthworm Jim* team to continue their hero's adventures is nearly over, although a cautious Tommy doesn't want to over-promise. "Because of the whole COVID crisis I would say that we're probably looking at 2023. We don't even really have the name of the new *Jim* game exactly. The working title is *Earthworm Jim 4*, but I always thought it would be funny to call it *Earthworm Jim 3 – For Real This Time!* Just for a little controversy, and a little humour. But it really is the third game that the original team has worked on."

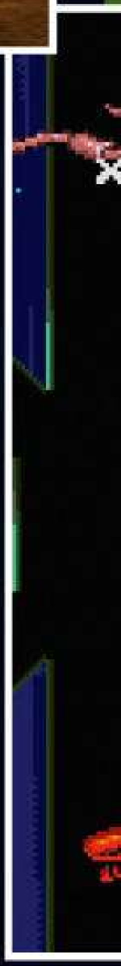
As an investor in the Amico, David is obviously fully behind the new *Earthworm Jim* title for the system, but he's also keen to see the character's new TV show. "Intellivision has managed to get the rights to make an *Earthworm Jim* game, and the support of the original team, so it technically stands the best chance of being authentic. I'm also really excited that Interplay is bringing back *Earthworm Jim* as a TV show. I'm not currently involved, so I'm just crossing my fingers and hoping that I like it when I see the final thing."

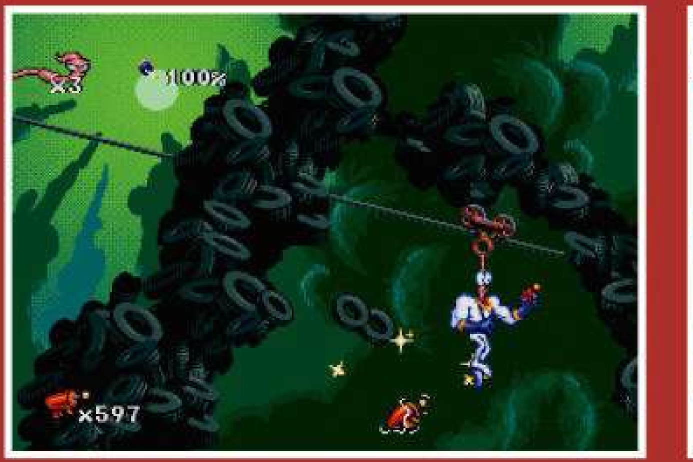


» [N64] Interplay Productions saw fit to include Earthworm Jim in its N64 brawler *Clay Fighter 63 1/3*.

When asked how he feels about the original game now, David reveals the effort that went into coding it, which explains why it still plays so well and feels so responsive. "It's become a bit of a cult hit at this point, but being the programmer, there's always stuff I wish I did differently. I care passionately about the *feel* of games, and you could pour thousands of hours into trying to get the *perfect* feel when controlling them."

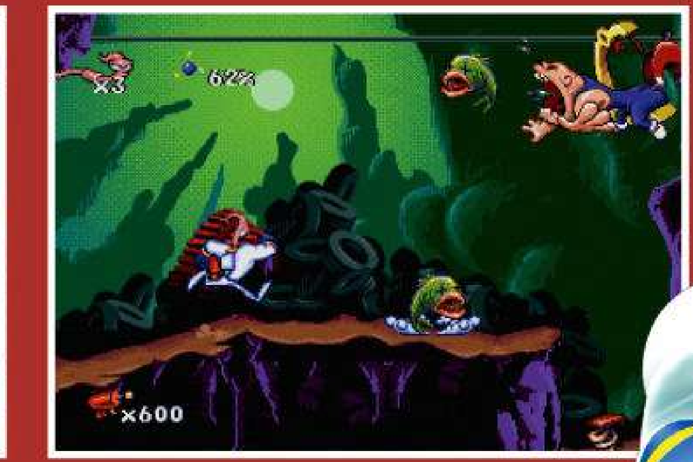
Earthworm Jim's background artist and main level designer Nick Bruty has just as personal a view of the game, and he clearly values his time working on it. "I'm proud of all the *Earthworm Jim* stuff I did at Shiny. *Earthworm Jim* was fantastic, you know, being free from a major corporation, having our own independent studio, doing everything completely crazy and having people responding in a really positive way. It was an amazing experience, with one of the best teams I've ever worked with." ✱





CROSSING THE LINE

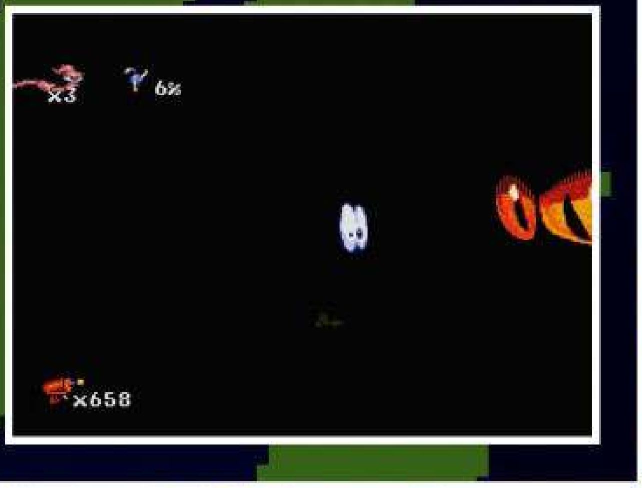
■ New Junk City is full of unlikely ways to get around. As well as chains hung horizontally above hazards that Jim crosses hand-over-head, there are zip lines to slide down or blast your way along. There's even a conveyor belt that you have to clamber up while avoiding the junk on it.

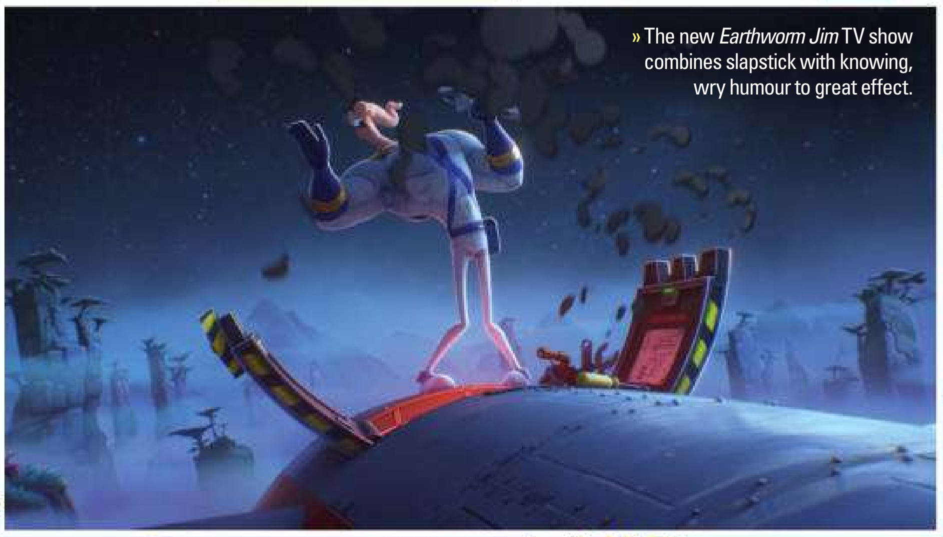


WHAT'S UP CHUCK?

■ Junkyard boss Chuck is well-named – if you shoot or head-whip him he throws-up deadly fish! He operates a crane that drops crates, and you need to whip each one to the right and knock it onto a spring as he passes overhead. He'll vomit fish, but the crates will run down his energy.

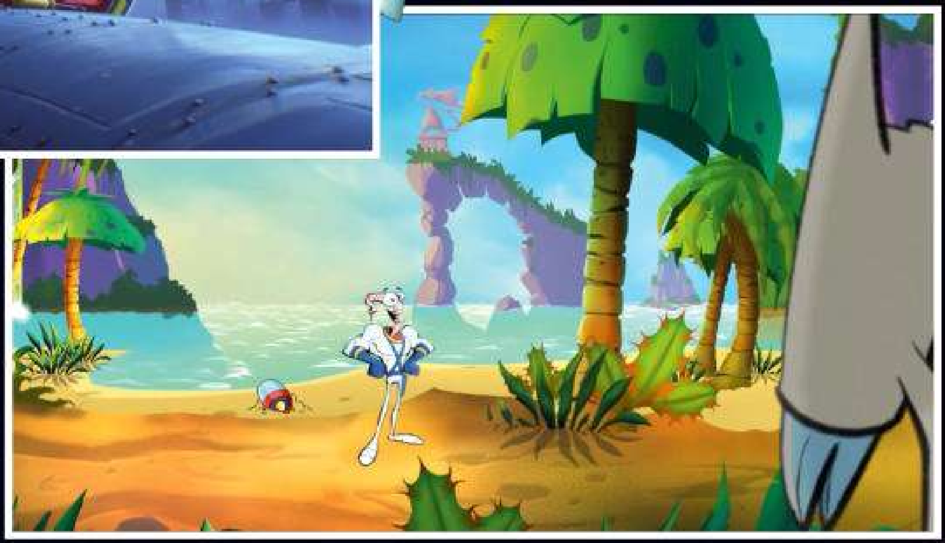
> "WE'RE DESIGNING SOMETHING UNIQUE JUST FOR THE AMICO, AND THAT REALLY ENHANCES THE JOKE ASPECT OF IT"
> **TOMMY TALLARICO**





» The new *Earthworm Jim* TV show combines slapstick with knowing, wry humour to great effect.

» [Amico] The *Earthworm Jim* Amico title begins with its hapless hero crash landing his rocket on a beach.



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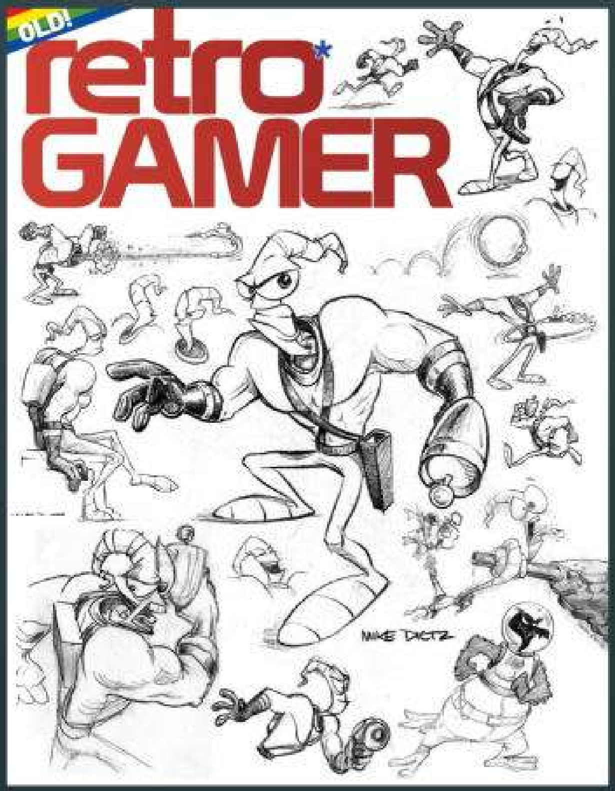
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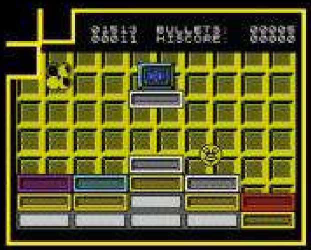
THE MAKING OF S·T·O·R·M

STORM WASN'T JUST ANOTHER GAUNTLET CLONE – IT WAS THE FIRST TO ARRIVE ON HOME COMPUTERS, AND IT WAS A BUDGET GAME TO BOOT. RETRO GAMER DISCOVERS HOW THE GAME'S CREATORS THREW DOWN THE GAUNTLET AND WHIPPED UP A STORM

Word By Martyn Carroll



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BRIDGE TO THE EAST
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1984

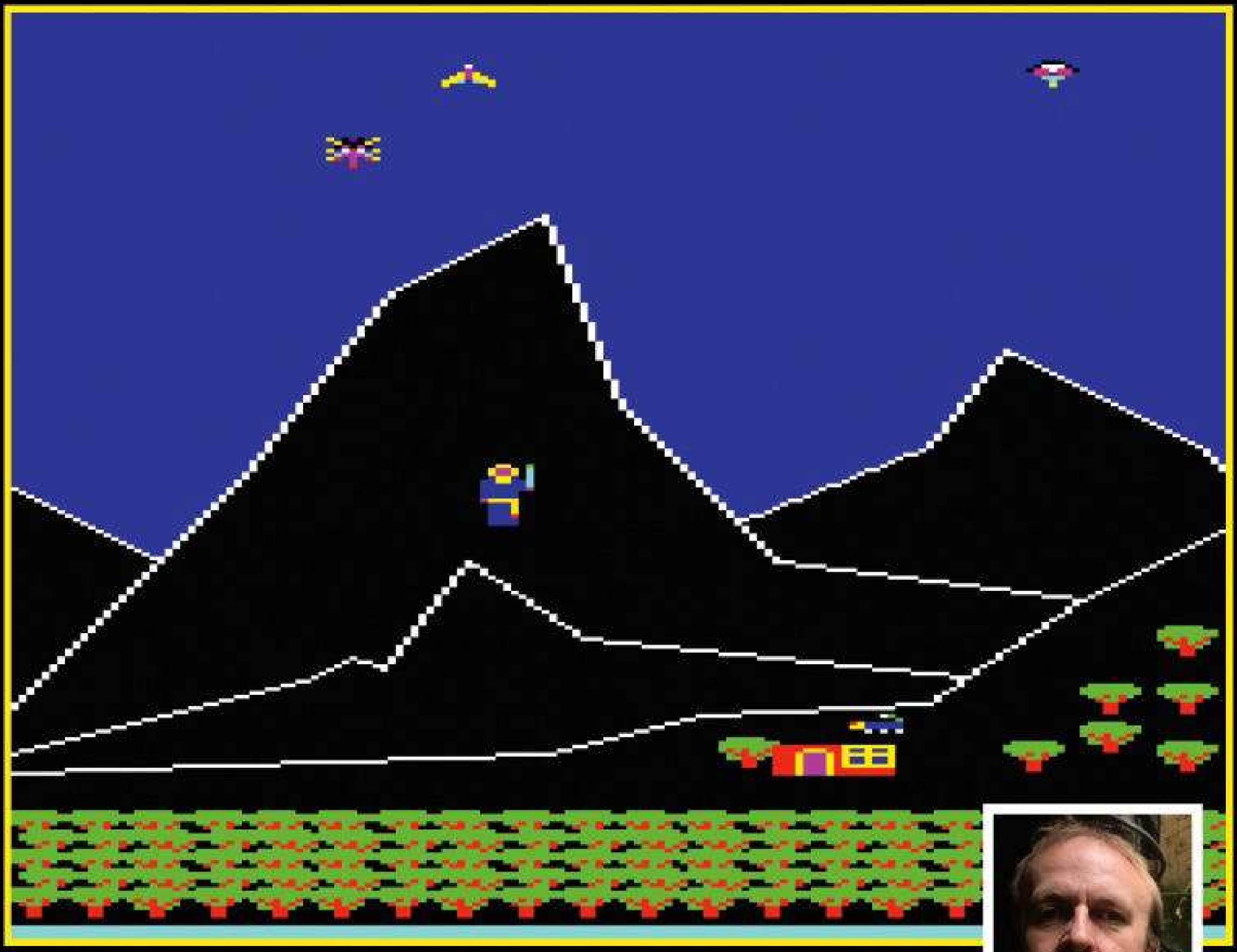
BALL CRAZY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

BIGFOOT
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1990

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- » **DEVELOPER:** THE FIRM
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** MAZE GAME

» Kevin Shrapnell is currently CEO of Magic Fuel Games.



» [BBC Micro] Before *Storm* there was *Bridge To The East*, an arcade adventure game based on another of Seán's fantasy poems.

» Seán Martin is a published author, poet and filmmaker.

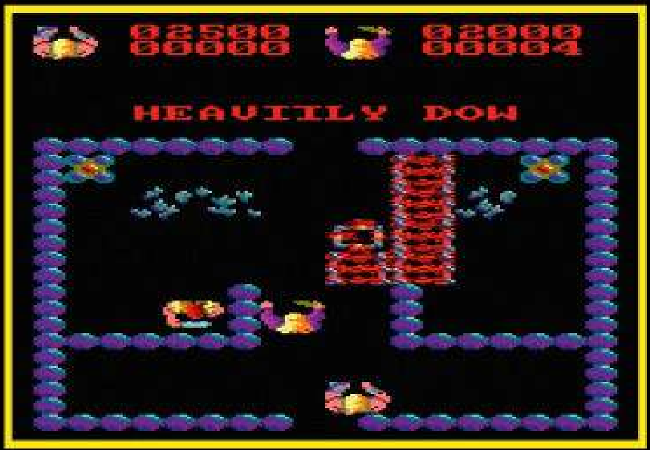
God bless Mastertronic, purveyors of bargain-budget gems. In the Eighties, when the cost of 8-bit games was creeping towards (and sometimes beyond) the £10 mark, Mastertronic came along with a catalogue of titles costing just £1.99. The pocket-money price meant that the games secured floor space in the smaller retailers that the main wholesalers ignored, such as newsagents, convenience stores, video shops and petrol stations. It was a classic disruption strategy and it saw Mastertronic sell more than 2.1 million units between its launch in April 1984 and July 1985.

The business model meant that Mastertronic was also incredibly agile and was often able to beat the bigger publishers to the punch. A textbook example was *Storm*, a two-player clone of Atari's *Gauntlet* which went on sale several months before US Gold's official conversion. The effect of this was perfectly illustrated in the September 1986 issue of *Computer And Video Games* magazine, where it was revealed in the news that US Gold had commissioned Gremlin Graphics to develop the 8-bit conversions of *Gauntlet*, while in the same issue *Storm* received a glowing review. "*Storm* is by far and away the best budget game I've ever seen on any micro," commented editor Tim Metcalfe. "As good as many full-price offerings around right now… a budget game that thinks it's worth nine quid!" The game scored a 'Rave' award in *Amstrad Action*, with Andrew Wilton singling out the co-op gameplay, saying, "If this was a one-player game it would be pretty good – it earns its Rave with the two-player option." *Computer Gamer* magazine also praised *Storm* in a review that casually dropped truth bombs at US Gold's door. "That this game should appear before *Gauntlet* is surprising, that it should be at a budget price is truly amazing."

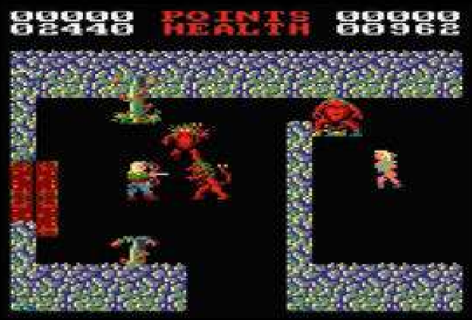
> **"WE SPENT A FAIR AMOUNT OF TIME IN THE ARCADES AND GAUNTLET WAS A TOTAL GAME-CHANGING INFLUENCE"**
>
> **Kevin Shrapnell**

Storm was created by The Firm, a small Somerset-based developer which initially comprised three friends: Mike Talbot, Kevin Shrapnell and Seán Martin. Seán says, "The Firm was Mike and Kev doing the programming, with me providing ideas, but my time was curtailed by being away at university – I remember always working on games when I came back home. The Firm came into being after the demise of our earlier company Ixion Software. Ixion's most successful game was *Bridge To The East*, which was released in 1983. This was a combination of arcade-style and text-based gameplay. There were various shoot-'em-up levels to get through, and then you'd have a text-based level, which usually involved solving a puzzle. The game is, at least on a conceptual level, a precursor to *Storm*, because both games were based on epic fantasy poems of mine. Yes, that's the sort of thing teenage poets write!"

The Ixion games were all written for the BBC Micro, but this would change following the launch of the Amstrad CPC. "In 1985 Ixion did a text adventure for the Amstrad CPC called *The Avaunting*. When The Firm got going, Mike



» [Amstrad CPC] The game could be played solo, but it was much easier, and far more fun, when played co-op.



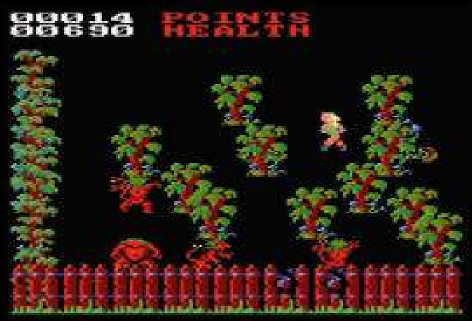
» [Amstrad CPC] The superior sequel was released on Mastertronic's MAD label in 1987 and came with a premium price tag of £2.99.

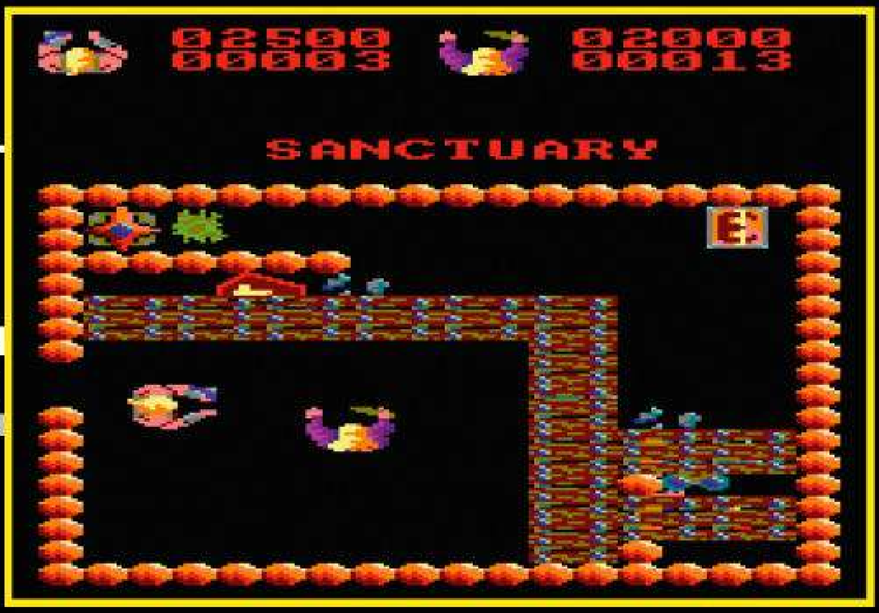
EMBRACE THE FEAR

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GO BACK IN THE DUNGEON

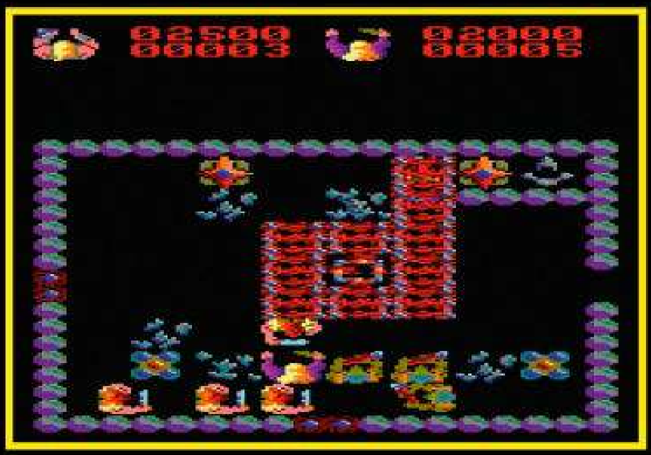
Storm was such a sizeable hit, particularly on the Amstrad CPC, that The Firm returned the following year to produce a sequel. In *The Fear: Storm II*, the evil wizard has finally acquired the Fear, the box-shaped artefact that he was searching for during the events of the first game. It's now up to Agravain's daughter Silver and her man Prince Frost to find the Fear and return it to its rightful place in the crypt of a creepy old monastery (that's overrun by demons, obviously).

The sequel is another dungeon-crawler, yet there are a couple of key differences. Firstly, the viewpoint is skewed down slightly, which brings perspective into play and gives many screens a maze-like quality. Secondly, and significantly, the tank controls from the first game have been replaced by a standard up, down, left, right system. This makes movement much faster, although bizarrely the characters can only fire their weapons to the left and right. That aside, the sequel is a step up from the first game in almost every way. It's a shame then that *The Fear* is largely unknown compared to the original – no doubt because Mastertronic only published it on the CPC and not multiple other platforms.





» [Amstrad CPC] Some screens feature few enemies, allowing you to take a breather and stock up on supplies.



» [Amstrad CPC] Enemies and enemy generators are often hidden from view beneath the wooden floorboards.

and Kev decided that the Amstrad market had more potential than the BBC, and so we decided to focus on writing for that."

Kevin was not involved with Mike and Seán at Ixion, but being local and like-minded, their paths were always destined to cross. "At the time I was running a hobby game shop called The Dragon's Lair," recalls Kevin. "We met at the shop and they were interested to know more about tabletop RPGs, and I was looking for a way to take my hobby game design into something more, dare I say, professional. We played some *Call Of Cthulhu* together and started to hangout and talk about computer game ideas. Mike was the technical brains behind everything we did. Seán was at university through some of the early days, but we worked together on design, art, sound and anything else that was needed. Everything that happened involved all of us, and we shared creative duties."

Storm was The Firm's first published title, but it wasn't the developer's first game. "*Storm* was actually our second project together," reveals Kevin. "Our first game was based on procedurally creating a world to explore and everything in the world was generated randomly. Unfortunately we hadn't really considered the realities of publishing the game and kept developing ideas until the disk was full. The game was never published but we learnt a few things in that process. When we started *Storm* we were much more focused and had a more reasonable plan for releasing the game on cassette. We spent three-to-four part-time months working on the game, fitting work around game development."

The inspiration for *Storm* will not shock you. "*Gauntlet* was absolutely our main inspiration," says Kevin. "We lived in Weston-Super-Mare and spent a fair amount of time in the arcades, and *Gauntlet* was a total game-changing influence."

Unlike *Gauntlet, Storm* features a rather detailed backstory which introduces the main characters and explains their motivations. It transpires that an evil wizard, the questionably named Una Cum, is searching for an all-powerful MacGuffin called the Fear. As a distraction, he has kidnapped Prince Storm's wife Corrine and hidden her in an underground maze filled with monsters and traps. It's up to Storm and his friend, the good wizard Agravain, to raid the lair and find three special keys which will unlock the door to the room holding Corrine.

The story was provided by Seán. "The world of *Storm*, like *Bridge To The East*, was based on one of my epic poems," he says. "I only wrote three of them, which formed a trilogy. *Storm* was based on the first poem, *Window On The West*. The title is a steal from *The Lord Of The Rings*, but was equally inspired by the cover of the album *Trespass* by Genesis, which shows a lord and lady looking out of a window across a mythical landscape. I can't remember much about the story – it was the usual light versus darkness, sword and sorcery stuff – but it was fairly detailed and Mike and Kev took what they needed for *Storm*."

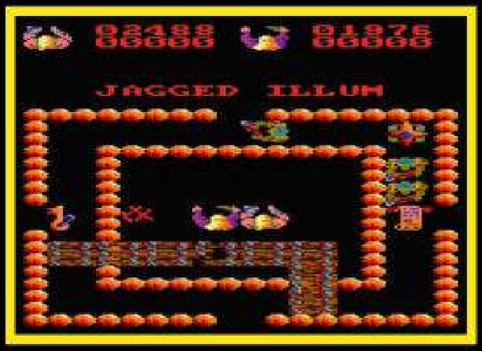
In a nod to Ixion's text adventures, each of the game's 100 rooms features a brief text description which scrolls across the top of the screen, revealing such delightful details as, "The floor of this once impressive room is now drenched in a seething slime," and, "The sweet smell of rotting flesh washes down from the north, violating the air."

Storm was developed directly on an Amstrad 6128 and once the game was finished, The Firm quickly found a publisher in Mastertronic. "We just reached out to them based on a magazine ad, sent them a demo and then made the connection," remembers Kevin. "It was all pretty straightforward, we didn't experience any of the horror stories you hear about the UK game scene of the Eighties. We wrote *Storm* for the CPC and Mastertronic provided all of the other versions. The game was released on a crazy-long list of platforms." *Storm* was converted to six formats including

CONVERSION CAPERS

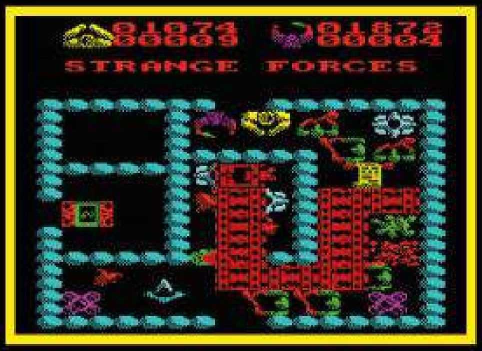
AMSTRAD CPC

According to Kevin, this is the 'true' version. "*Storm* had a simple but effective difficulty mechanism," he says. "Each room you cleared added one to the spawn rate for generators. In the other versions this feature was removed, so only Amstrad players had to master the true experience."



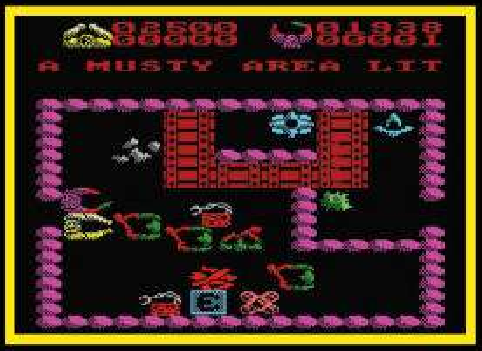
ZX SPECTRUM

The graphics were ported from the original CPC version, which gives the game quite an unusual look on the Spectrum. At least a lot of lovely colour has been retained. Sound is limited to the occasional effect (there's no 128K version, so no AY soundtrack). This is a very decent conversion.



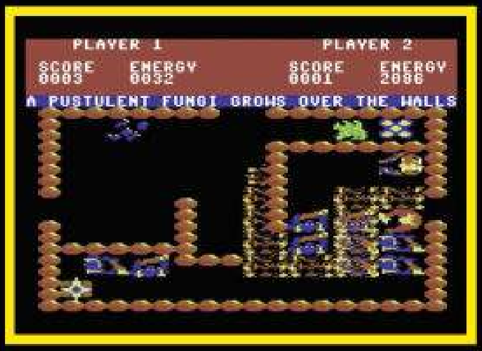
MSX

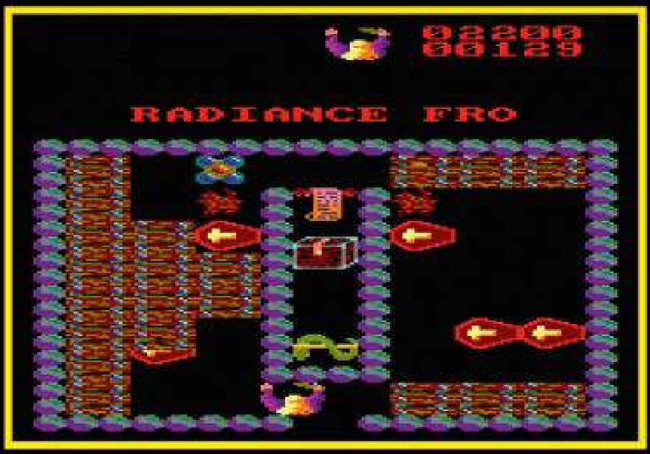
Both this and the Spectrum version were converted by Simon Freeman and in almost all respects they're identical. The only real difference is the audio. While the Speccy version features a few blips and beeps, on the MSX there's a full in-game tune playing alongside various effects.



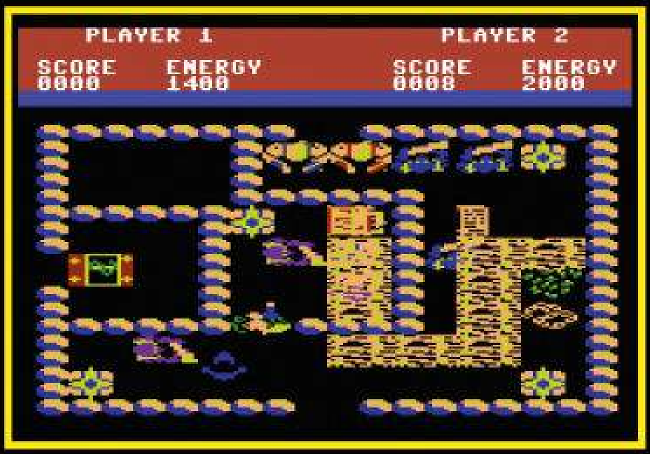
COMMODORE 64

Converted by Jim Baguley (note the spelling, it's not the person you might be thinking of), the C64 version features a wider display which means some screens have altered layouts (nothing major). It also features a heroic title tune by David Whittaker which sadly does not play in-game.





» [Amstrad CPC] That's one of the special snake keys located. Just two more to find and the game is won.



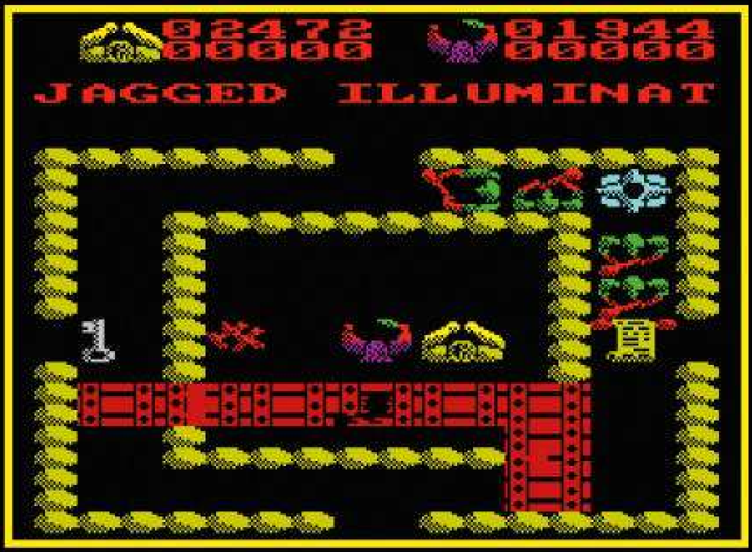
» [C16] Although it was noticeably pared back, the C16 version actually sold more copies than the C64 release.

the ZX Spectrum, MSX and Commodore 64. Across all the different platforms reviews for the game were mixed (*Crash* and *Zzap!* both went in hard, awarding it 44% and 32% respectively), but many reviewers agreed that *Storm* was a bit of a bargain. In hindsight, should The Firm have considered courting a full-price publisher? "We were happy," says Kevin. "Maybe it would have been better at full price, but I don't think the game had full-price production values! It sold very well at a budget price, and we received a regular supply of royalty cheques."

The game did sell well. According to data shared by Mastertronic's former financial controller Anthony Guter, the game shifted 197,782 copies across all seven formats, making it Mastertronic's 18th best-selling title of all time. Interestingly, around a quarter of the total sales were on the lead CPC format, with the Spectrum version taking the second largest chunk. Mastertronic paid a royalty rate on every copy sold, including the conversions that were outsourced (once the conversion programmer's flat rate had been covered). "We were paid a £1,500 advance on *Storm* and I think we received 10p per unit sold, so total earnings of £15-25k sounds feasible," says Kevin. "Nobody retired on the profits, but it paid the rent and bills for some time."

The proceeds allowed The Firm to expand, as Seán explains. "Previously most of the work was done at Mike's house. We eventually got an office in town, and moved in around December 1986. I remember decorating the place was a team effort. The Firm also grew in size. Four or five others joined the team by the end of 1987." More staff meant more games and several budget titles followed including *Ball Crazy* for Mastertronic, *Combat Zone* for Alternative, and *Bigfoot* for Codemasters. The Firm also developed a sequel – *The Fear: Storm II* – which continued the story and introduced some welcome refinements. Sadly, none of these titles would repeat the success of *Storm*. "We all thought *The Fear* was a better game than the original," says Seán, "but it didn't receive as much notice when it came out in the spring of 1987."

The Firm soon fizzled out and the team went their separate ways during 1988. Kevin says, "Seán was off at university, Mike moved to Paris for a couple of years to work for a French game publisher, and I moved to London and joined EA. My first boss at EA was the producer on *Druid*, another *Gauntlet* clone, and it was nice to remind him that *Storm* beat *Gauntlet* to market." Looking back, both Seán and Kevin have fond memories of The Firm's early days, when they created *Storm* at Mike's house in Weston-Super-Mare. "It was a very happy time", says Seán. "We lived and breathed the spirit of *Monty Python*. We all worked well together, and there were days when all we seemed to do was laugh – but this helped the work. There was a vaguely gangster-ish look to The Firm. We liked to wear overcoats and hats, and smoke cigars. I remember we took some photos early on at Ebbor Gorge, a nearby beauty spot."



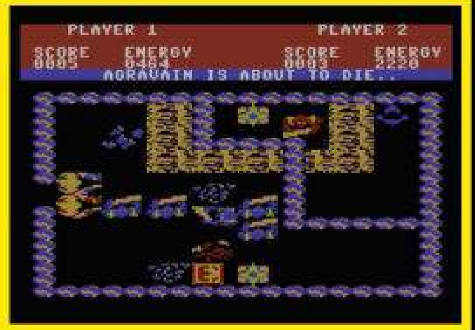
» [ZX Spectrum] Mastertronic converted the game to multiple formats, and it became a solid hit on all of them.

"We did photo shoots with long coats, hats and cigars, and spent time hanging out at Glastonbury," confirms Kevin. "For *Storm* in particular, I remember we regularly went to the local library to borrow records for inspiration, mostly jazz, folk and the occasional native tribal chant. I am not sure that any of those things contributed to the development of *Storm*, but they were part of the indie life. Overall it was a really good time, plenty of highs and lows but a great start to working in the industry." ★

HOW THE VARIOUS VERSIONS OF STORM STACKED UP

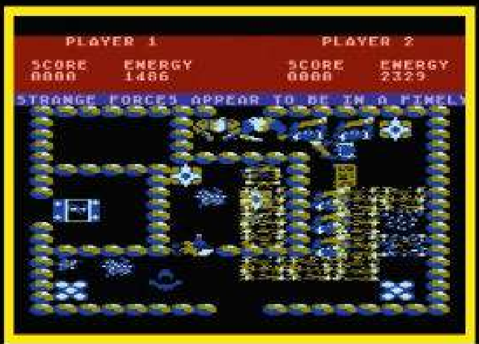
COMMODORE 16

This looks very similar to the C64 version, but some (OK, a few) compromises have been made to squeeze it into 16K. There's no music, no scene-setting text messages, and crucially, there's only 40 rooms compared to the full 100 featured in every other version of the game.



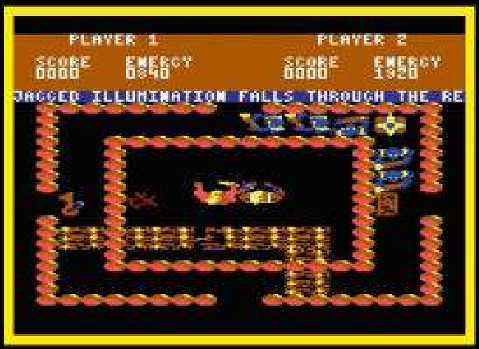
ATARI 8-BIT

Another Jim Baguley conversion, so you'll be unsurprised to read that this is almost identical to the C64 version. It also features the same David Whittaker title screen music and effects. The only change is the reduced number of on-screen colours, but this doesn't detract from the game.



PC

Mastertronic released around 75 games for the PC and *Storm* was one of its bestsellers on the format. Converted by Randall Don Masteller, the game is based on the C64 version, and when running on EGA mode, it looks very similar to it. One difference: you can select the speed of the game.



> "WE LIVED AND BREATHED THE SPIRIT OF MONTY PYTHON. THERE WERE DAYS WHEN ALL WE SEEMED TO DO WAS LAUGH"
>
> **Seán Martin**

» The boys from The Firm, pictured at Ebbor Gorge in Somerset, giving off strong Bugsy Malone vibes.

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Attack Of The Mutant Camels

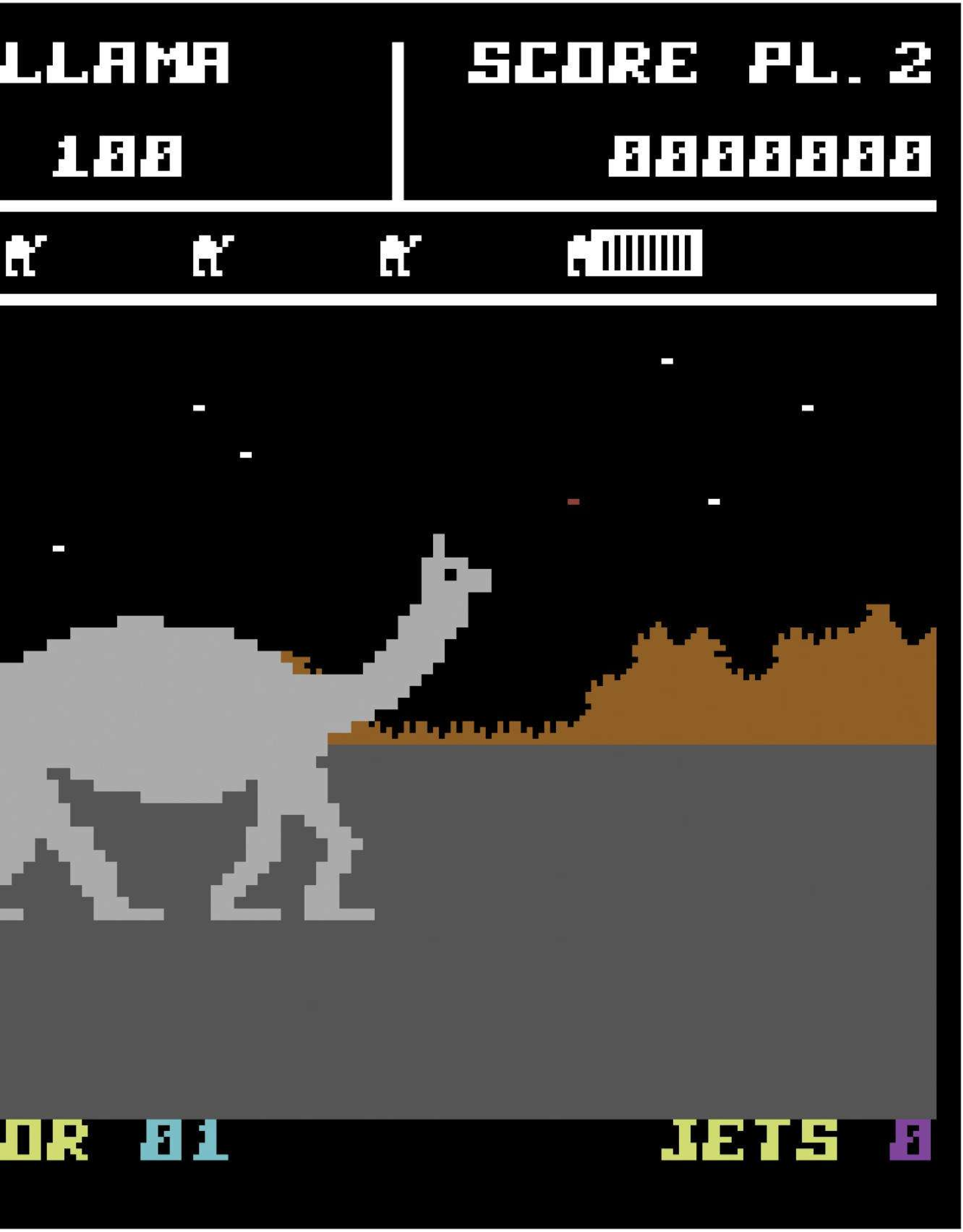
CAUGHT IN ITS CAMEL CLUTCHES

» COMMODORE 64 » 1983 » LLAMASOFT

One of the benefits of growing up with older cousins was the hand-me-downs that you'd get, and the first time I benefitted from that in a gaming sense was when I was given a Commodore 64 in 1994. My cousins were teenagers, and they'd made the switch up to the Mega Drive and SNES, so the trusty breadbin went to me. For the most part, the games they gave me were exactly what you'd expect – lots of sports stuff, TV and film licences like *Ghostbusters* and *Knightmare*, and of course arcade conversions like *Space Harrier*, *Double Dragon* and *Paperboy*. But like me, one or the other had an eye for silly concepts, though this didn't always work out as the presence of *Bionic Granny* proves.

One of the other things I got a lot of was *Commodore Format* Power Pack tapes, and I like to imagine that my cousin saw *Sheep In Space* and *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* on the cover one month and decided it was an instant purchase. It was certainly an eye opener for me. I didn't know that it was a lot like *The Empire Strikes Back* as a kid, but then I'd also never seen a *Star Wars* film at that point anyway. The silly name drew me in, and the simple shoot-'em-up gameplay kept me going when a lot of the stuff I got for the computer was just a bit over my head.

I won't pretend that I was a Jeff Minter devotee from there on – I was seven, after all – but it was my first encounter with a formula that has kept me coming back to his work for decades since. Good shooting and some references to ungulates, that's all I need. I played the free Java trial of *Gridrunner++* to death as a teenager, and hoped that *Unity* would be a GameCube exclusive I'd be recommending to all my friends. I even broke my own rules about not buying digital-only releases to pick up *Space Giraffe* and *TxK*. So today, I look back at that tape with a great deal of fondness. *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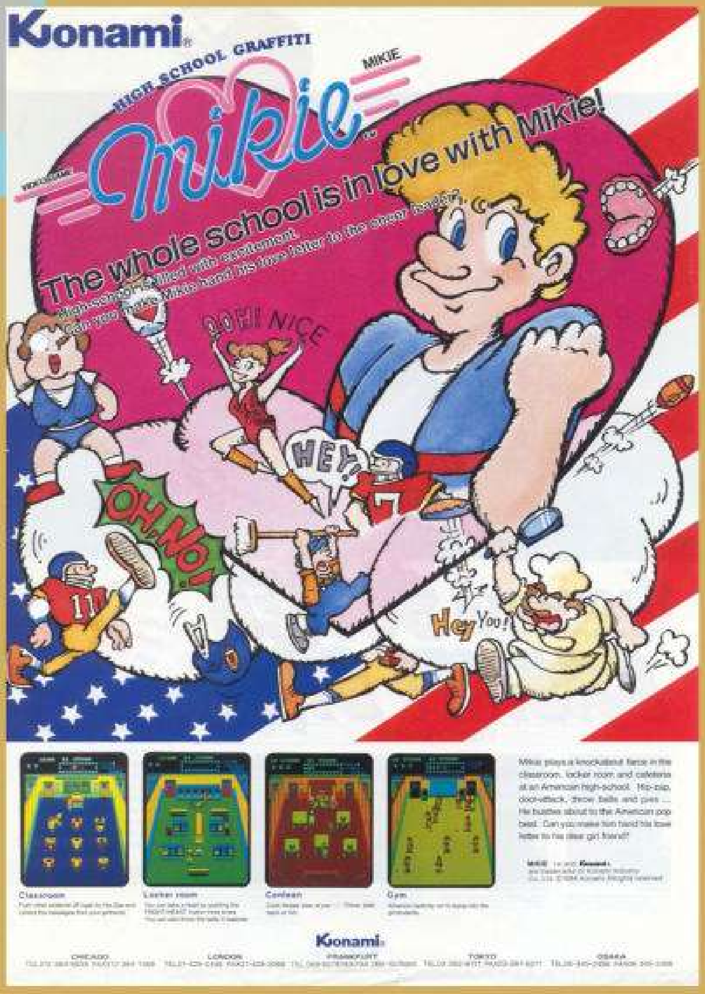
ULTIMATE GUIDE

Mikie

SPEAKER
MIKIE

Buoyed by the success of Track & Field, the following year Konami tried its hand at a totally different type of arcade game. Inspired by the Fifties nostalgia of films such as Grease and American high-school flicks, this is the story of the amorous Mikie and his quest to deliver a heartfelt message to his girlfriend

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

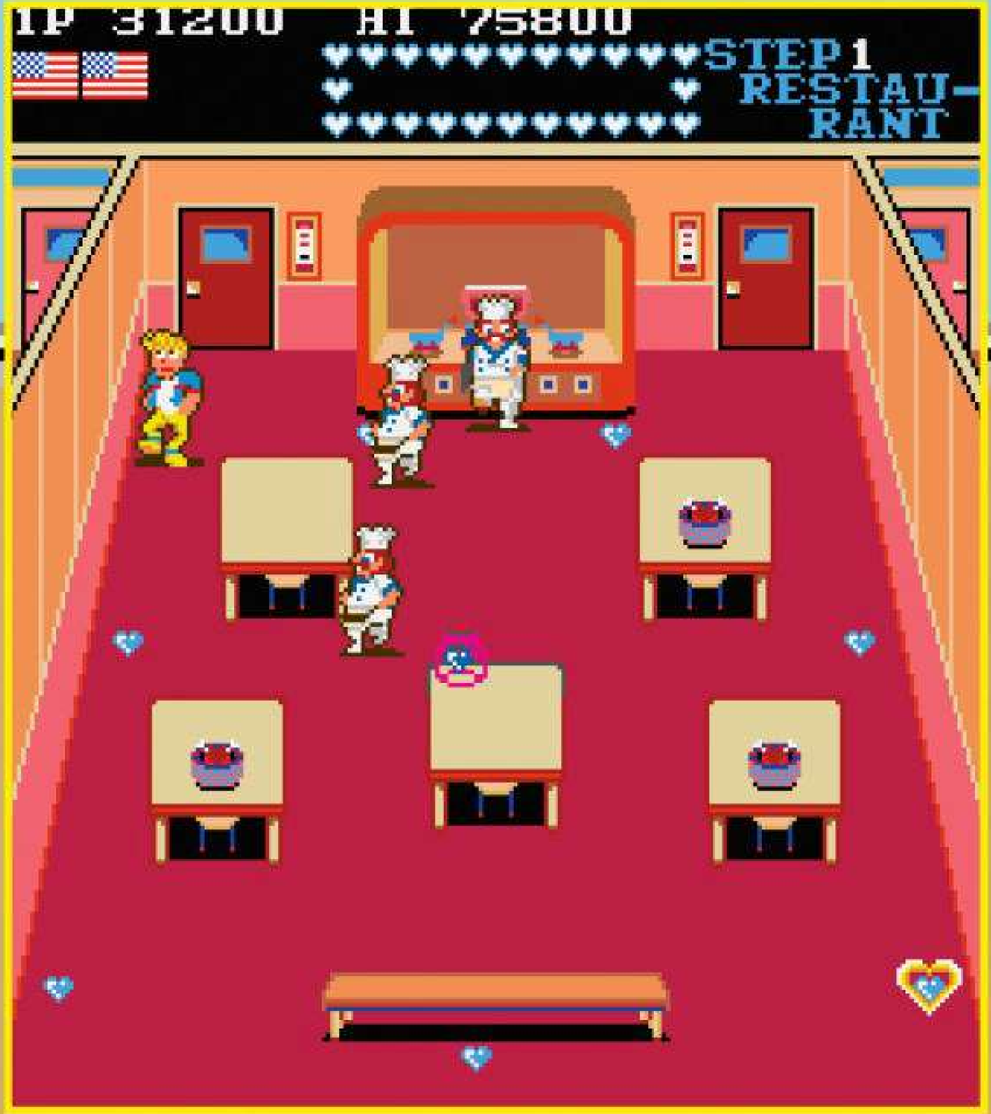


There's no doubt that there is a decent amount of overlap in cinema and videogame demographics. In the Eighties, with the popularity of movies such as *The Outsiders*, *Fast Times At Ridgemont High*, *Fame* and *The Breakfast Club*, the commonality was even more pronounced. Mix in the late-Seventies hits *Grease* and *Animal House* and it's no surprise that eventually, someone would attempt a videogame based around the concept of a cheeky high-school student, disobeying the teachers and generally behaving badly, all in the name of love. The company was Konami and the game, at least to Western audiences, was *Mikie*. And it's a funny old tale.

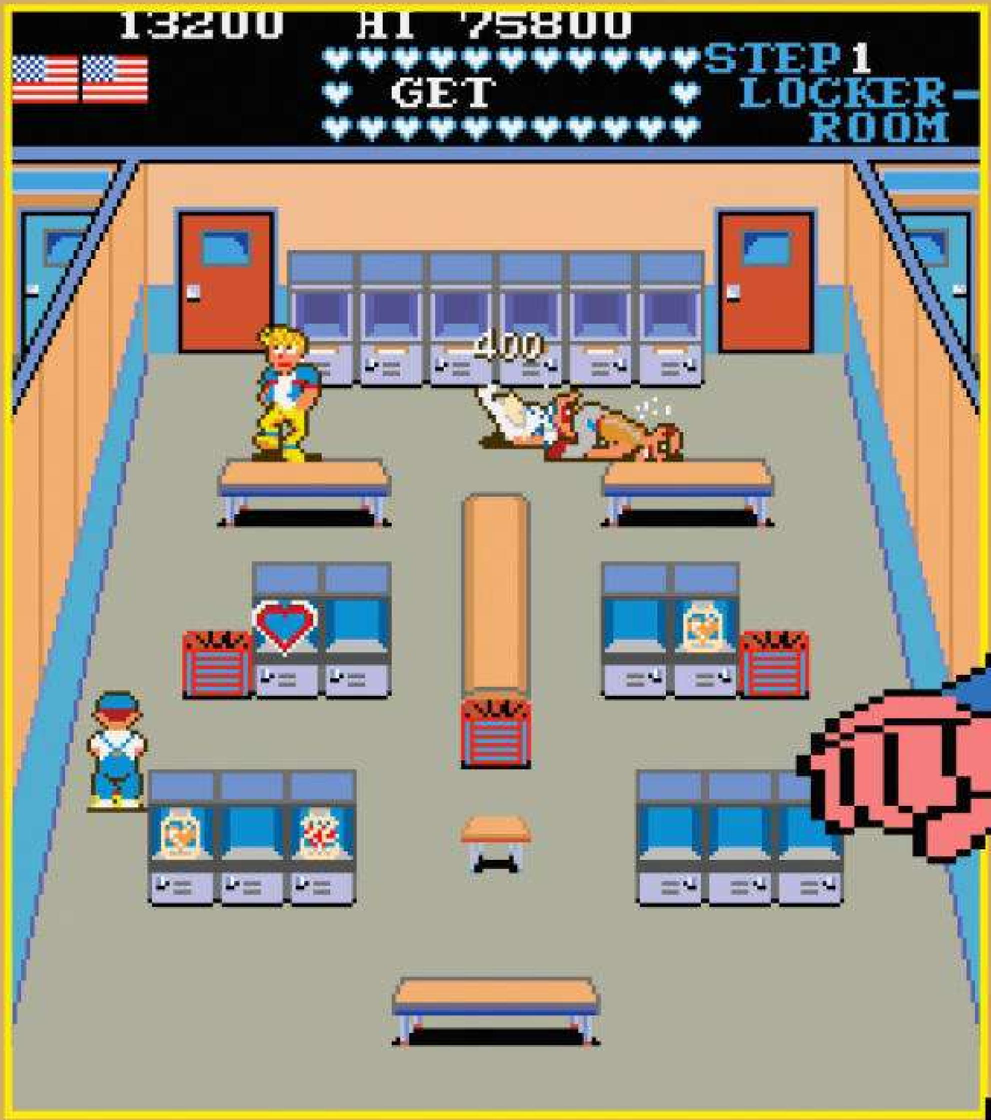
First, the story inside the game itself. Eschewed of the standard alien invasion backdrop, *Mikie* is a simple love story, strangely mixed in with some wanton and entirely unreasonable violence. Mikie has decided to take a message to his girlfriend, who is waiting patiently for him by the school gates. In order to achieve this, our eponymous youngster collects the hearts that are dotted around the school. Some of these are hidden underneath his fellow students' chairs and Mikie collects these by bumping the poor saps off their seats. Chasing him around the classroom is the teacher – he is supposed to be studying, after all – and should he catch up with the tearaway then a life is lost. Fortunately, depending on which version of the game you are playing (we'll get to that later), Mikie can temporarily incapacitate his teacher by either head-butting or shouting at him.

Once the hearts in the first class have been harvested, Mikie takes to the school hallways which are no less hazardous for the errant lad. Pursued by not only the teacher, but a jobsworth janitor, Mikie must make his way to the locker room and collect more hearts, this time by bashing open the lockers. Next up is the restaurant and its trio of cooks, angry that this heart-collecting student has interrupted their dubious culinary efforts. After another jaunt through the school corridors, the final class is the dance studio where a group of young ladies follow their instructor's energetic workout. There's just the teacher to watch out for here – boy, he's persistent – but bumping into one of the gyrating girls sends Mikie temporarily loopy, making him vulnerable to the chasing tutor.

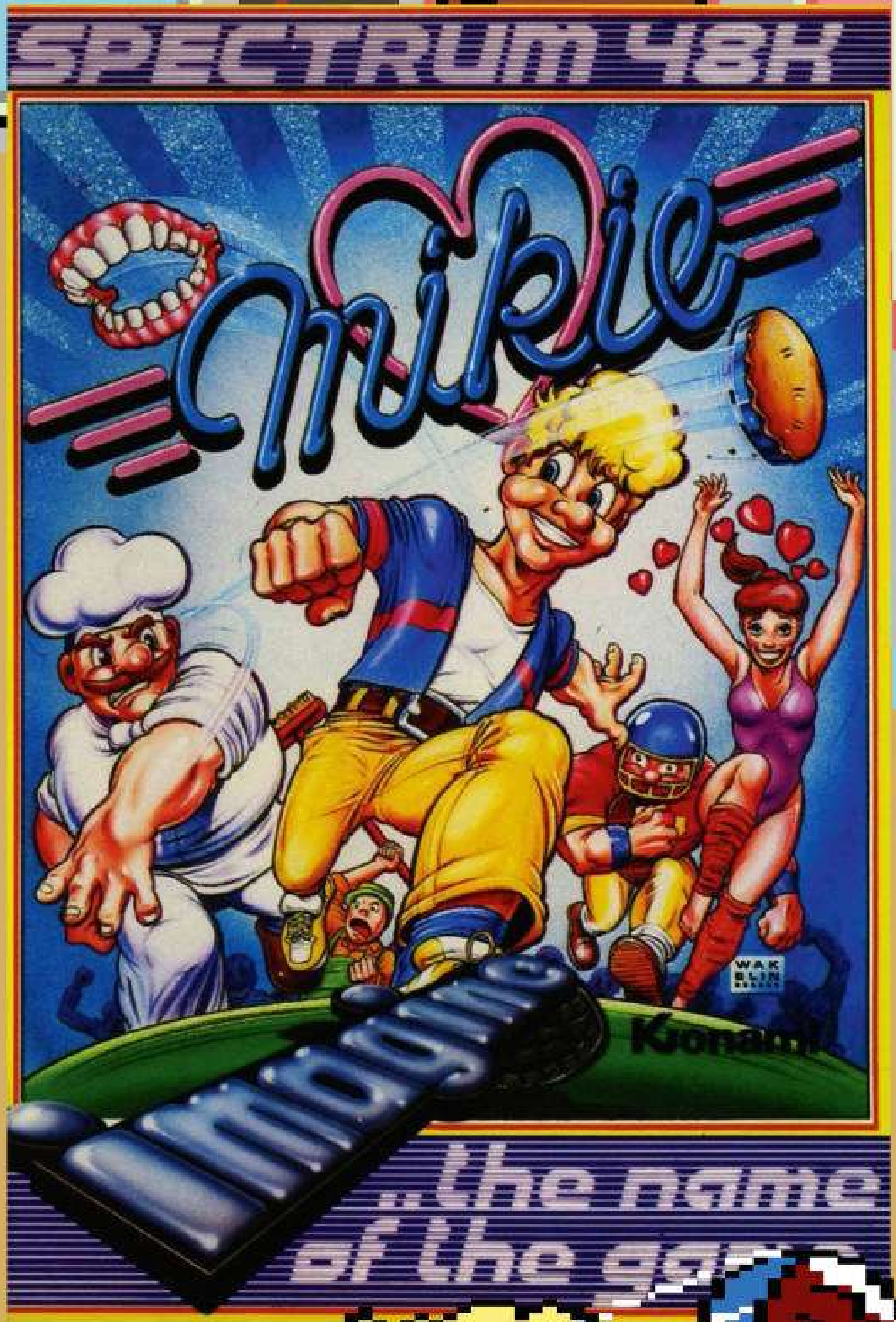
Once the hearts in all these locations have been collected, Mikie escapes outside to the school garden. At the top of the screen


1P 31200
HI 75800
STEP 1
RESTAU-
RANT

» [Arcade] Causing chaos in the restaurant. The chef at the top doesn't move, choosing to hurl food at Mikie instead.


13200
HI 75800
GET
STEP 1
LOCKER-
ROOM
400

» [Arcade] The locker room has three more hearts to grab. Mikie has just head-butted the cook and his teacher.


SPECTRUM 48K
Mikie
Imagine
Konami
..the name of the game

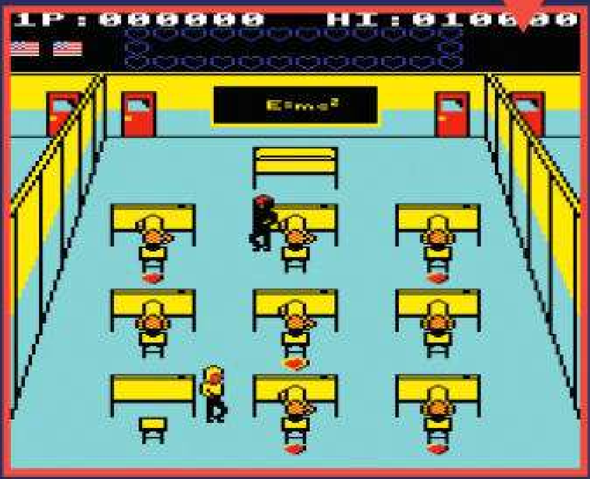
» The Ocean/Imagine home ports of *Mikie* were very well-received.

CONVERSION Capers

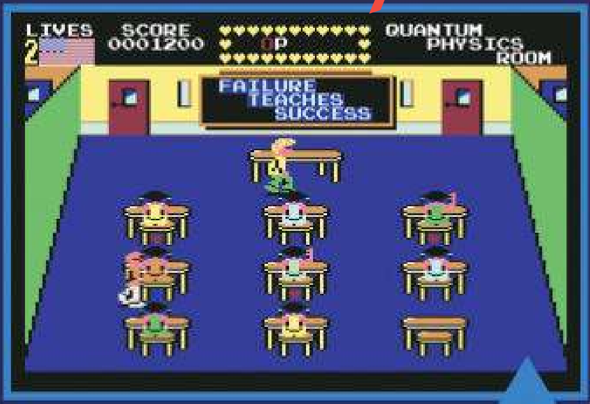
WHICH VERSIONS OF MIKIE ARE WORTH BUNKING OFF SCHOOL TO PLAY?

BBC MICRO

Peter Johnson turned in a technically excellent port of *Mikie* on the BBC Micro and Electron that unfortunately inherits the original's stodgy controls. Nevertheless, there's a delightfully languid rendition of *A Hard Day's Night* and it's entertaining enough to be one of the better BBC Micro arcade conversions – it's just a shame about those controls.



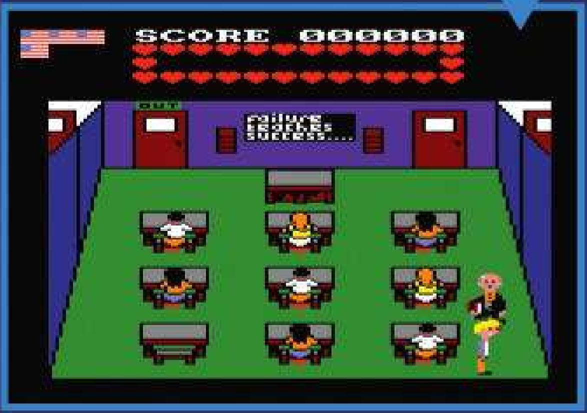
COMMODORE 64



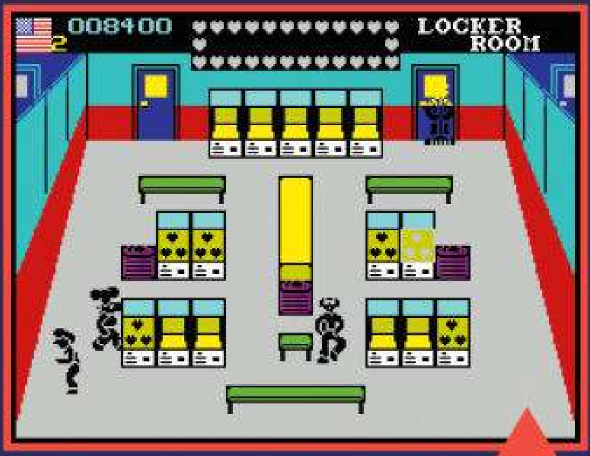
While some of the fussiness of the arcade game's controls are retained, the brilliant use of colour and stunning Martin Galway music ensure that this Commodore 64 game by Tony Pomfret and Steve Wahid is another wonderful effort. Our particular highlight: the teacher's teeth zinging across the classroom before amusingly embedding in the wall.

AMSTRAD CPC

On the opposite end of the BBC Micro's relaxed tune, Amstrad owners get a jaunty interpretation of the famous Beatles song, *A Hard Day's Night*. Alas, despite looking pretty, the rest of the game is a little too frustrating to be anywhere near top of the class. A disappointment, especially considering its fantastic fellow Z80 version.



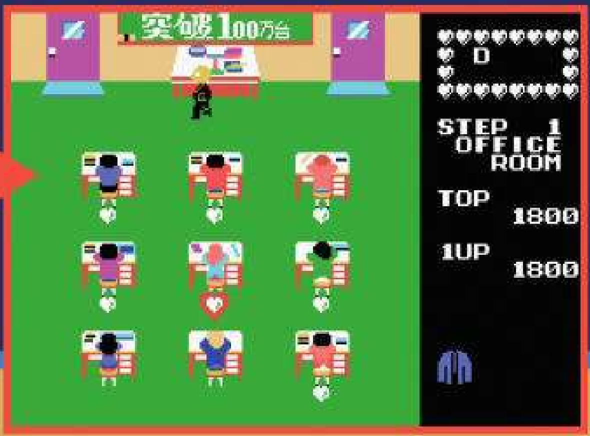
ZX SPECTRUM

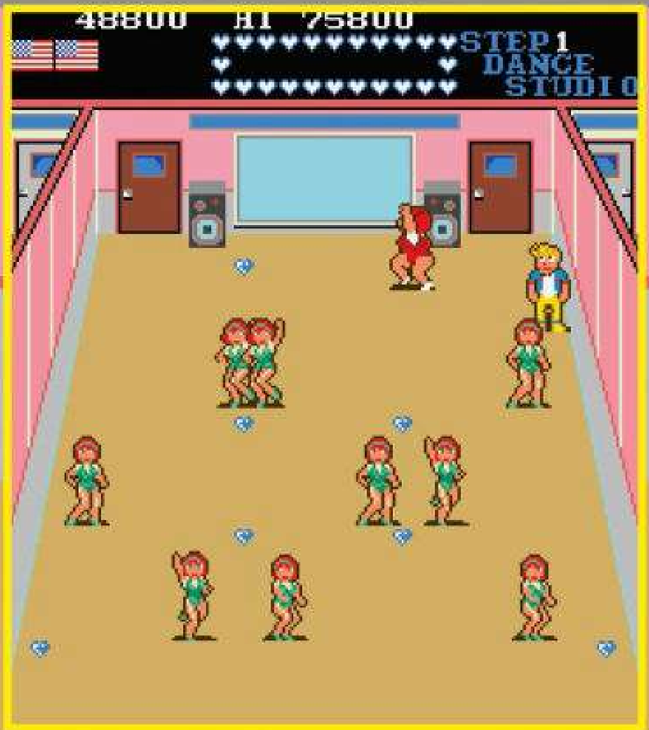


The dearly-missed Jonathan Smith was on coding duties for Spectrum *Mikie* and he predictably produced another brilliant arcade conversion. Based on *Mikie: High School Graffiti*, the fussiness of the game's controls is gone, replaced with a smooth and supremely fun style. Notably easier to play, and with a nice tune, this is one of the finest Spectrum arcade conversions on the system.

SG-1000

It's a trip to the office for this Sega home conversion of the Japanese game *Shinnyushain Toru-Kun*. The game's precious positioning makes the bumping, sitting down and even negotiating around tables tricky, but once you get used to this, it's a decently enjoyable and colourful game of unwarranted office violence where you get to head-butt your boss.



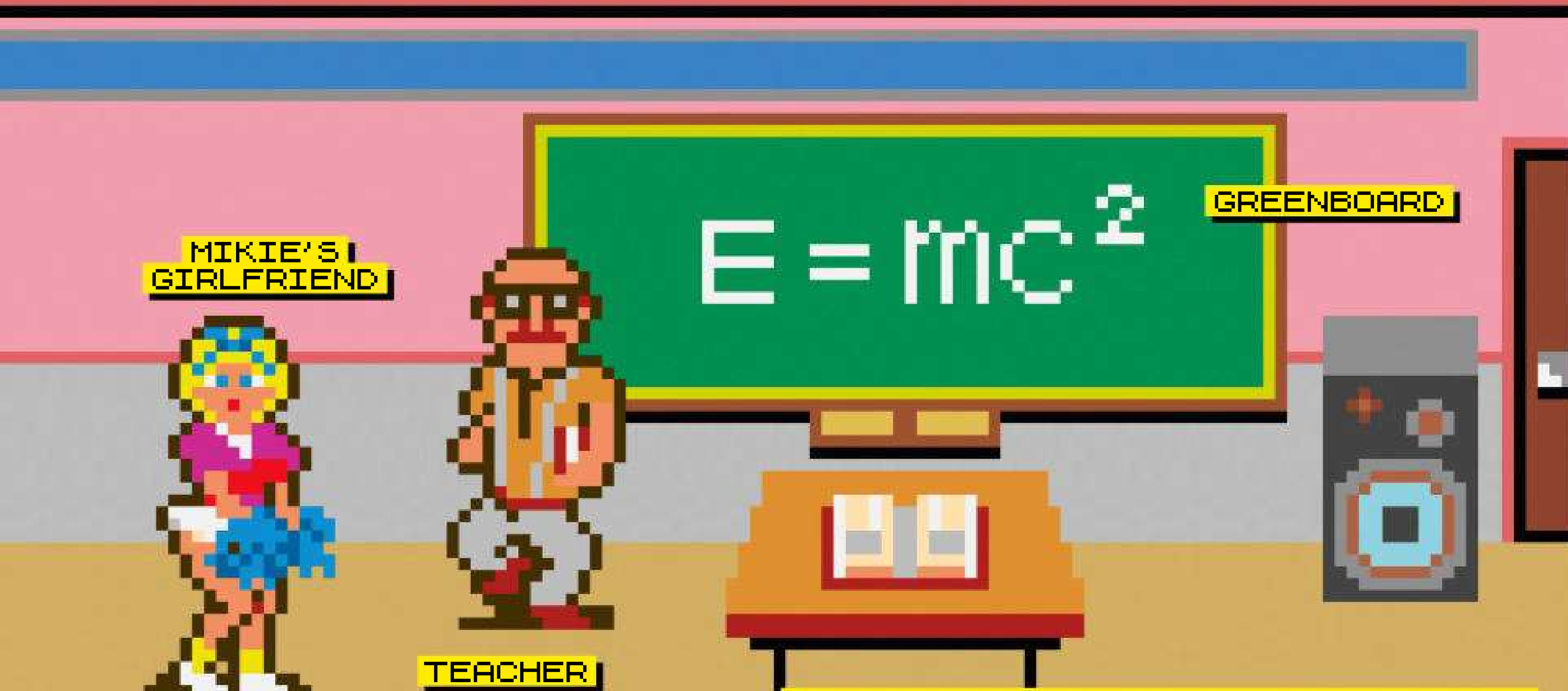


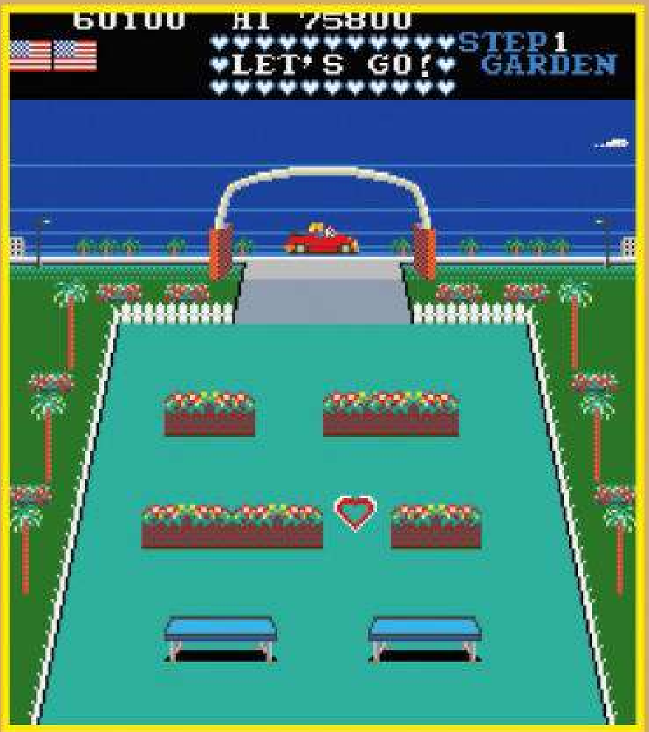
» [Arcade] In the dance studio, Mikie dodges dancers and the teacher as he collects hearts.

his girlfriend waits; between Mikie and his love are three yellow-jacketed jocks, ready to knock his block off should he get too close. Make it past them and to the school gate and Mikie delivers the heart-laden message, his girlfriend planting a loving kiss on his cheek. Thus reunited both physically and emotionally, the pair drive off, seemingly unconcerned about missing out on vital education. Ferris Bueller would be proud.

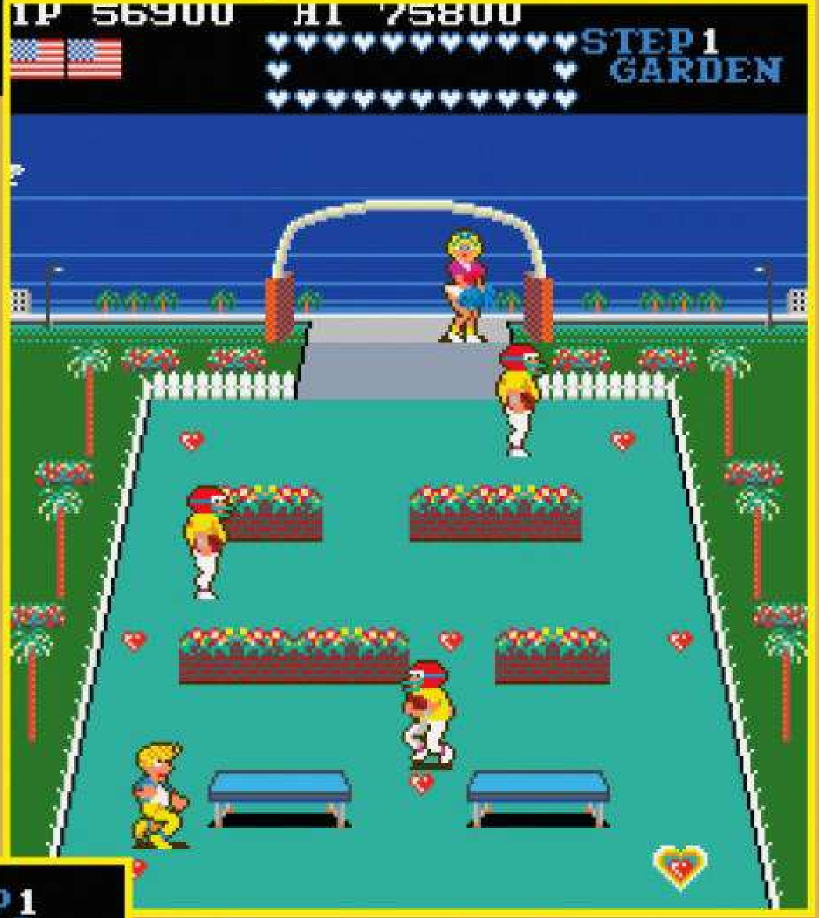
Point scoring in *Mikie* is achieved in several ways. Firstly, by collecting the hearts, with each small heart yielding 200 points, while the special flashing one nets Mikie a cool 1,000 points. Secondly, points are awarded for assaulting school employees and fellow students. Bumping one of the latter off their chair scores 400 to 800 depending on which row they're sitting. Stunning a teacher, janitor or cook scores 400 points if performed horizontally with double that score for a vertical takedown. In addition to this, there are significant points awarded for simply leaving a room, collecting certain items such as the lunchbox and hamburger and acquiring all the hearts in flashing order. There are also several hidden bonuses. Open an unmarked door in the school's hallway and it's likely you'll get a boot or boxing glove in the face. If it's Mikie's lucky day, however, he'll reveal a scantily clad lady and gain an impressive 5,000 points for his trouble.

By 1984, the golden era of arcade gaming was coming to an end, especially in the United States where the videogames crash of 1983 was felt more keenly than in other territories. Licensed by Centuri Inc for arcades in North America, *Mikie* was part of a desperate last gamble to save the coin-op machine company. Saddled with expensive Laserdisc flops such as *Badlands*, Centuri badly needed a hit, and pinned much of its hopes on this odd teen drama from its regular partner Konami. Unfortunately, while a moderate success thanks to its novel theme, *Mikie* failed to

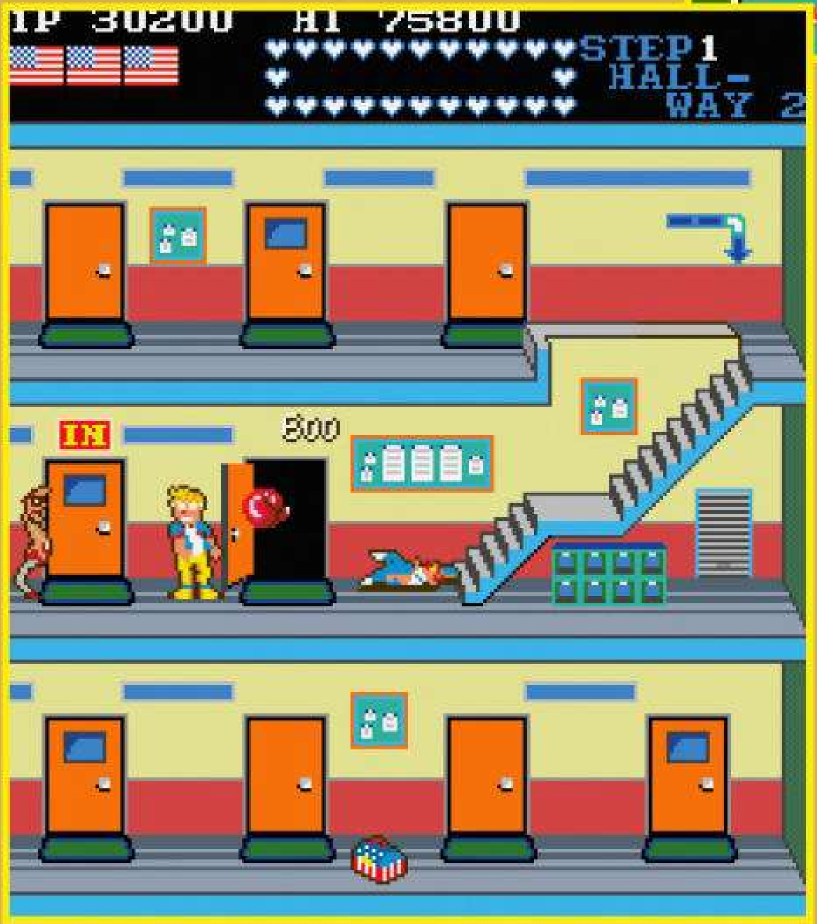

MIKIE'S GIRLFRIEND
TEACHER
GREENBOARD
E = mc²

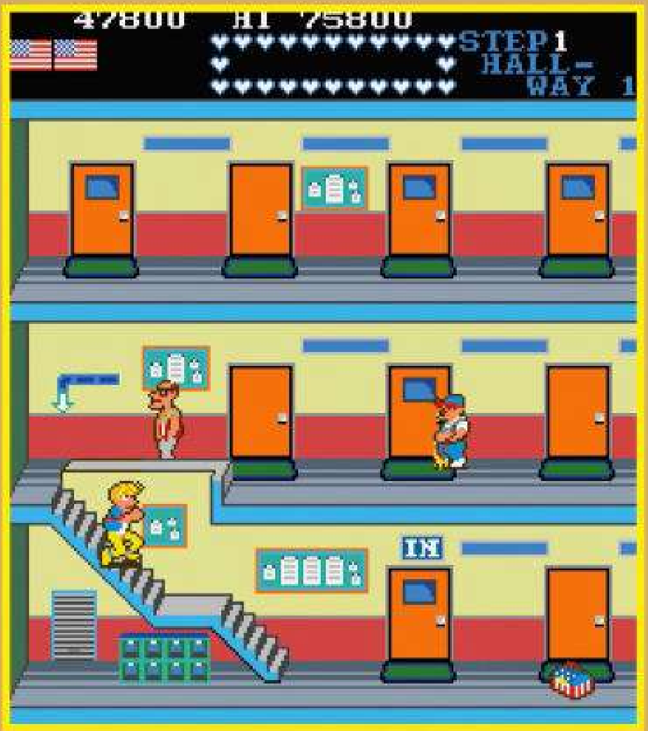

60100 HI 75800
LET'S GO!
STEP1 GARDEN

» [Arcade] Mikie finally makes it to his love and delivers his heartfelt message before speeding away, nonplussed by his education, or lack of.


1P 56900 HI 75800
STEP1 GARDEN

» [Arcade] *Mikie* doesn't let up, and this final screen, the garden, contains three fast-moving football players.

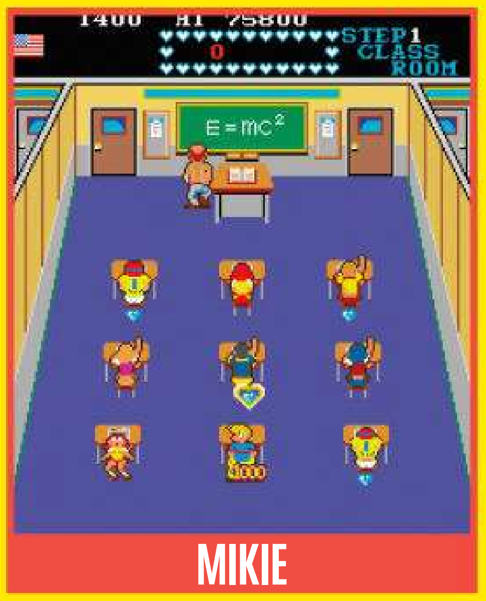

1P 30200 HI 75800
STEP1 HALL-WAY 2
IN
300


47800 HI 75800
STEP1 HALL-WAY 1
IN

» [Arcade] Descending to the ground floor. Don't forget to pick up that lunchbox, Mikie!

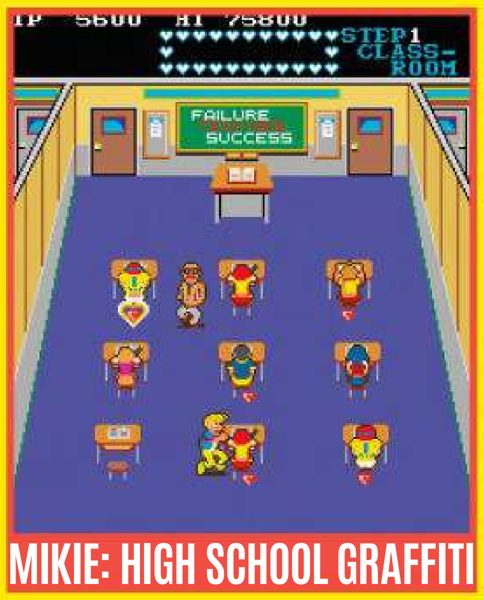
Multiple MIKIES

THE THREE ARCADE VERSIONS OF KONAMI'S CHEEKY CAPER


1400 HI 75800
STEP1 CLASS ROOM
E = mc²

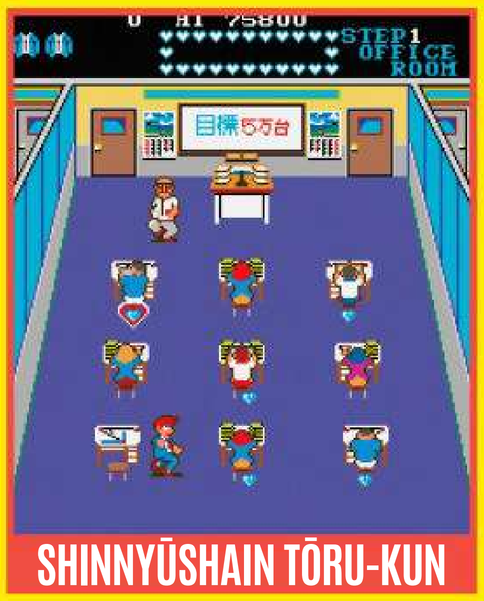
MIKIE

The original game for Western audiences, complete with head butt and E=mc2.


1P 5600 HI 75800
STEP1 CLASS-ROOM
FAILURE TEACHES SUCCESS

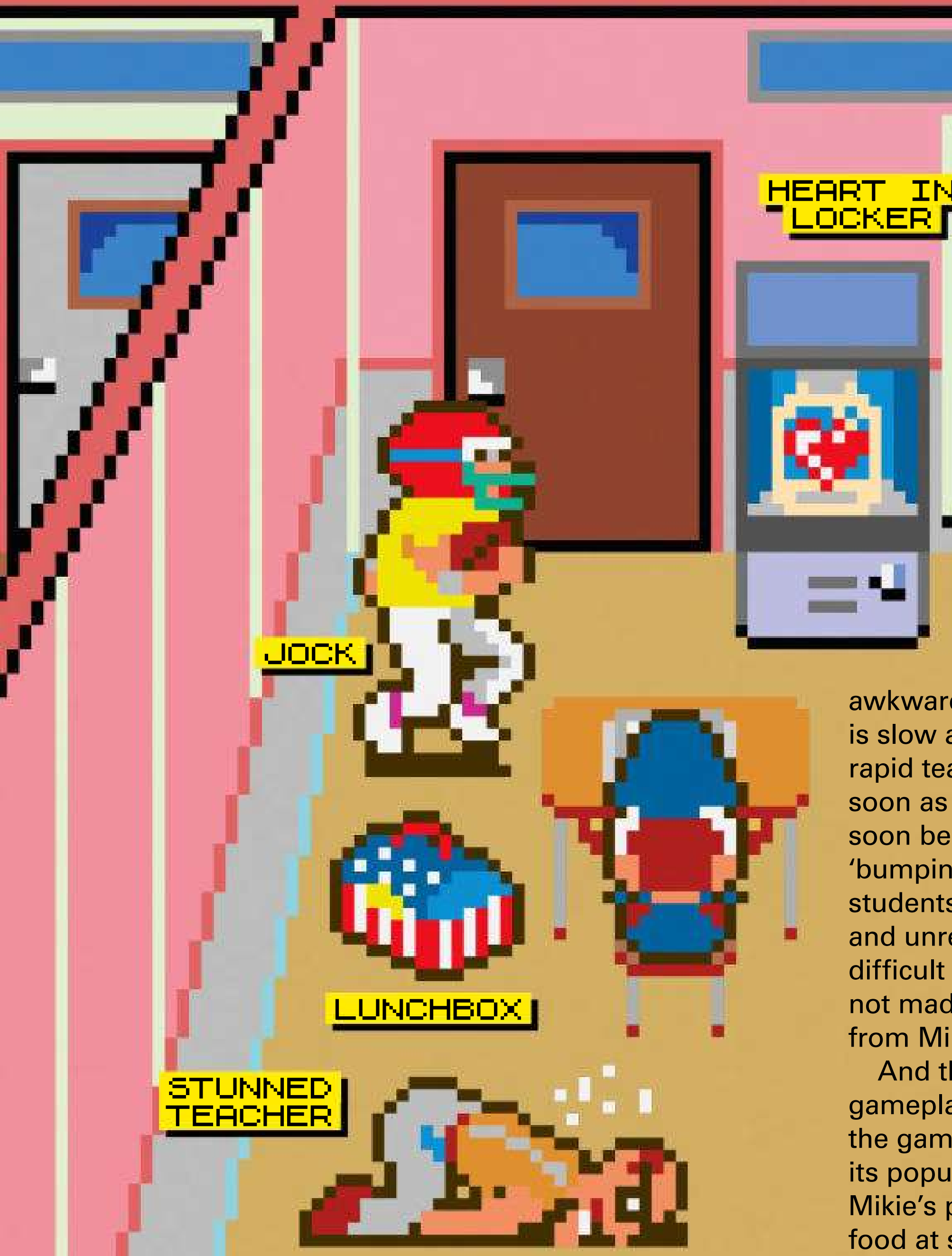
MIKIE: HIGH SCHOOL GRAFFITI

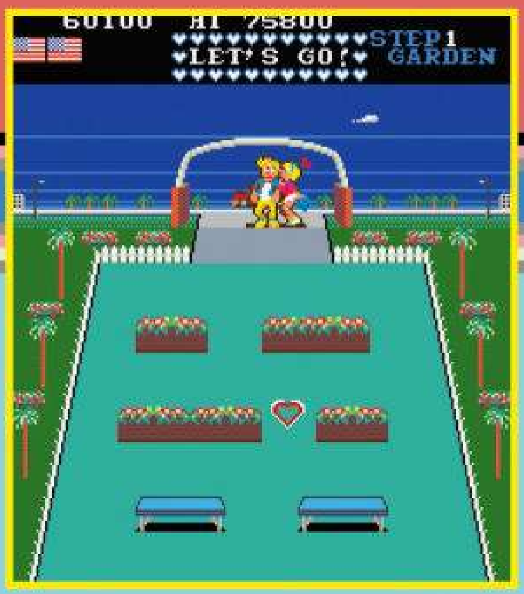
The cleaned up Western game with no head-butting and Failure Teaches Success.


0 HI 75800
STEP1 OFFICE ROOM
目標5万台

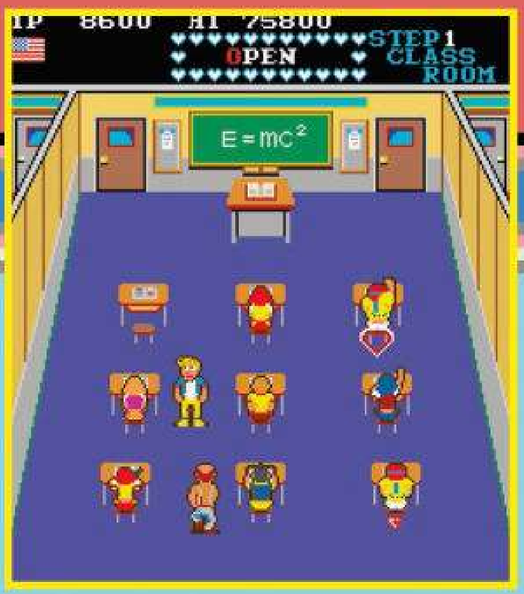
SHINNYŪSHAIN TŌRU-KUN

The version that Japanese fans played, now set in an office rather than a high school.





» [Arcade] Mikie's reward for his efforts: a kiss on the cheek.



» [Arcade] Better get back to your seat, Mikie!

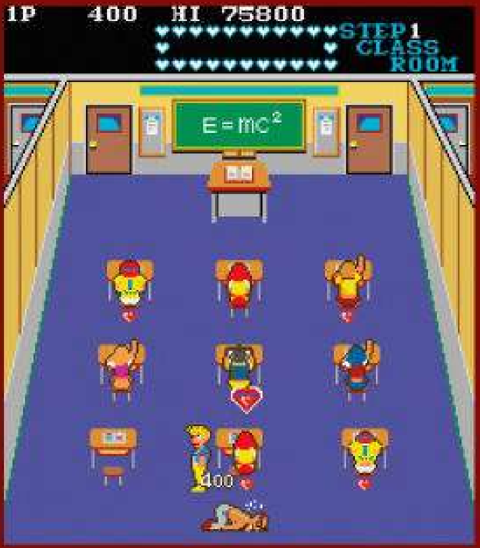
do serious business for Centuri, possibly due to its reputation as an awkward game to play. The head butt move is slow and cumbersome to use and with the rapid teacher constantly harassing Mikie as soon as he gets up from his seat, the game soon becomes frustrating. Worse still is the 'bumping' mechanic where Mikie unseats students so he can claim their heart. Stodgy and unresponsive, performing this trick can be difficult to perform initially, and it's certainly not made any easier by the incessant pursuit from Mikie's teacher.

And the trouble with *Mikie* didn't end with its gameplay issues. Stateside, controversy over the game's school-based violence impaired its popularity with arcade owners. Apart from Mikie's penchant for hurling basketballs and food at staff, his vicious head butt was a step too far for many. The result was *Mikie: High School Graffiti*, the titular teenager's assault now changed to an overpowering bellow, an adjustment that makes the game less violent yet much trickier to play. Meanwhile, back in Japan, Konami had already met considerable resistance to the overall premise of *Mikie* and its school-based setting.

The early Eighties were a tumultuous time for Japanese schools. Motorcycle gangs, known as bosozoku, were dominating youth culture and violence in schools was a hot topic. An arcade videogame, replete with unashamed acts of insurrection, not to mention its reckless violence, was destined to become notorious for all the wrong reasons. Subsequently, the worried suits at Konami ordered a change of scenario and *Mikie*

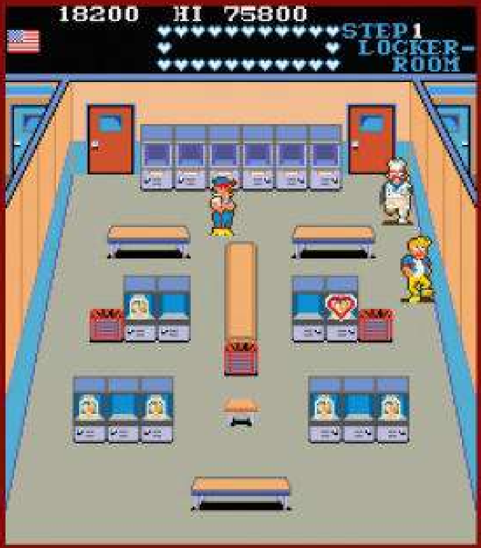
HOW TO AVOID *Detention*

MIKIE IS A NOTORIOUSLY TOUGH GAME – BUT HAVE NO FEAR OF THAT RAMPAGING TEACHER, RETRO GAMER IS HERE TO HELP



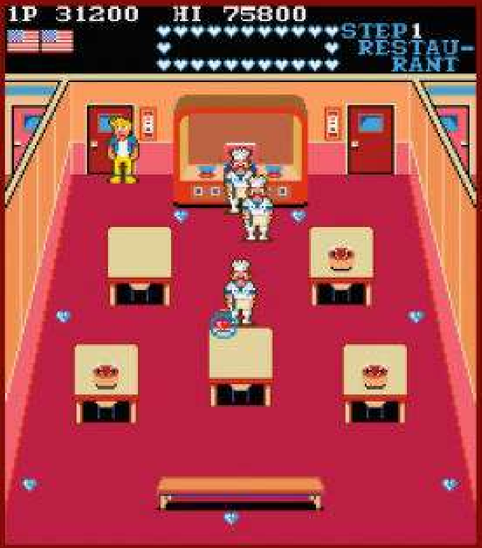
HEAD-BUTT WITH CARE

While the head butt move is a useful, if rather violent, method of temporarily dissuading Mikie's pursuers, it's something of a double-edged sword. Why? Because every time you connect with an enemy, they get angrier, more aggressive and faster. Can't say we blame them, and it means you should use it only when absolutely necessary.



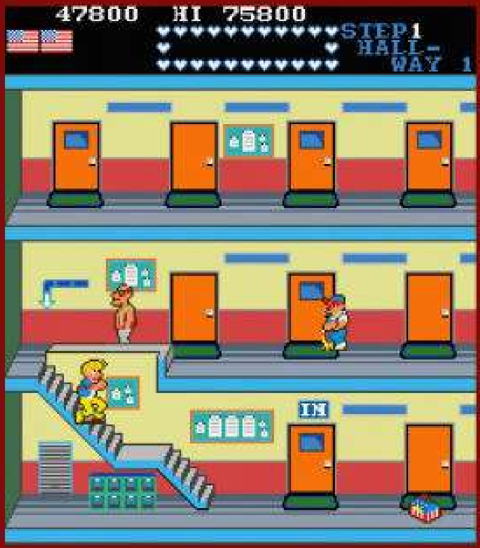
LOCKER ROOM TIPS

Mikie's second room houses the student lockers, cook and janitor. Don't linger by the door for too long because the teacher will soon be joining the others in hunting Mikie down. Here there are three bins full of basketballs which can be picked up and hurled at Mikie's shadows. Beware though: like the head butt, this angers and speeds them up.



RESTAURANT RUCKUS

Don't dally here because as with the locker room, the teacher is soon barging through the door looking for Mikie. Of the three cooks, one remains stationary at the top, chucking random slabs of meat at Mikie. Otherwise you can use similar tactics, with roast joints replacing basketballs and one heart inside a glass jar which must be smashed to release.

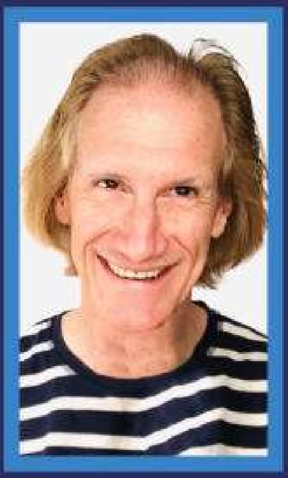


NAVIGATING THE HALLWAY

The school janitor haunts the corridors and while he doesn't specifically chase Mikie, he has a habit of hurling his bucket in the wayward student's direction. The teacher will soon be out of the classroom and back to stalking him again, so don't spend too long opening those doors and looking for the points bonuses.

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER TALKS TO PETER JOHNSON ABOUT HIS WORK ON THE BBC MICRO/ELECTRON PORT OF MIKIE



How did you get to work on *Mikie*?

Imagine was being used as a label for Ocean's arcade conversions at the time and for me, *Mikie* probably followed *Yie Ar King Fu*, also a Konami conversion for the BBC Micro and Electron. As I finished one conversion for Ocean, they would show me the other games they currently had in development, most of which were in their arcade room in the basement. I would choose one that I felt would suit my platform.

Were you familiar with the arcade game?

I'd never seen *Mikie* in an arcade, although I used to visit the arcades at nearby Whitley Bay quite often, to see what was new.

Did you code from scratch or convert another version?

It was all written from scratch for this version, both code and graphics, by studying the real arcade machine. I had one of Ocean's special suitcases containing a joystick and buttons and a Jamma interface which the circuit board from the real arcade machine connected to. I then viewed it on an RGB monitor from my Amstrad CPC 6128. I also had a VHS tape of someone at Ocean completing the game, so I could study the level layouts and see how the difficulty changed and so on.

Did you have much experience at this point of coding on the BBC/Electron?

Yes, at least three years of commercial development for it, a full-time job working from my home in Newcastle. I stayed a coder for a further four years or so, working on Atari ST, Amiga, Sega Mega Drive, then Atari Jaguar, before being asked to manage the Newcastle studio for Rage Games.

What did you think of the original arcade game? It must have felt quite novel, a change from all that shooting!

Thinking about it, most of my games haven't been particularly 'shooty'. I'm always attracted to something that is different and interesting.

How did you work around the comparatively limited resources of the BBC Micro?

To display a decent screen resolution in very little memory, I would use a four-colour screen with vertical colour interrupts, allowing different sets of four colours to be used in different areas of the screen to create the illusion of more colour (there were only eight possible colours on the BBC Micro, anyway).

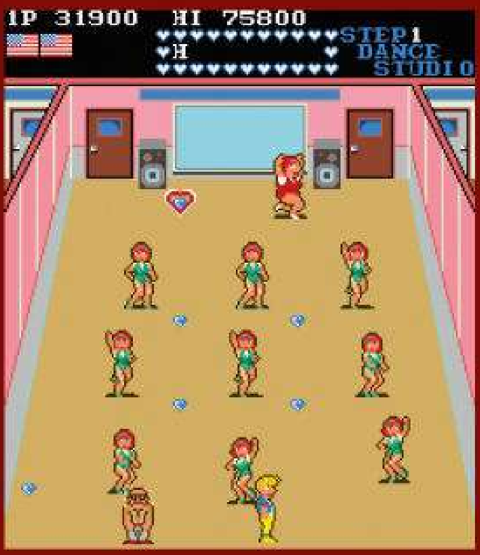
***Mikie* is renowned as an excellent conversion on the BBC – what's your own opinion of how you did?**

Thanks, I am happy with it. The game uses an unusual semi-top-down view, and its screens are littered with obstacles, such as desks and lockers. I developed an unusual sprite method, where it could simply EOR the character sprites as they were printed, masking behind the back part of objects on-screen without needing any clever code, or the overhead of reprinting the foreground. I was quite proud of that solution at the time, but it's the only game I needed it for.

Our thanks to Peter for his time.

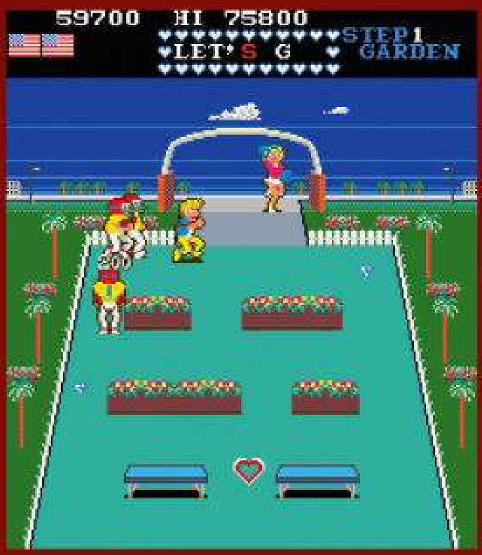
became *Shinnyushain Toru-Kun*, taking place in a stereotypical city office. Now, instead of head-butting a teacher, the hero assaults his boss and knocks fellow employees from their workstations, an aesthetic difference that in truth alters very little except the age of the game's characters. Throughout these changes, one thing that remains consistent is its music. Whether The Beatles' tunes *A Hard Day's Night* and *Twist And Shout* were officially licensed is highly doubtful, at least outside of Japan. But endorsed or not, the catchy riffs are a suitable aural enhancement to the high-school antics of Mikie and the office-based pandemonium of *Shinnyushain Toru-Kun*.

With *Shinnyushain Toru-Kun* converted to Sega's SG-1000 by Konami itself, the UK's Ocean Software published the only other home versions of *Mikie* and released them solely in Europe under its Imagine imprint. Presented with a marvellous cover courtesy of Ocean regular Bob Wakelin, the BBC Micro, Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum versions were all well-received, with the Amstrad CPC game lagging a little behind. While in Japan and America, *Mikie* remains a curio at best, in the UK these excellent home ports of *Mikie* endeared the game to a new audience, ensuring that in this region, at least, there's some love for the cheeky, head-butting scamp.



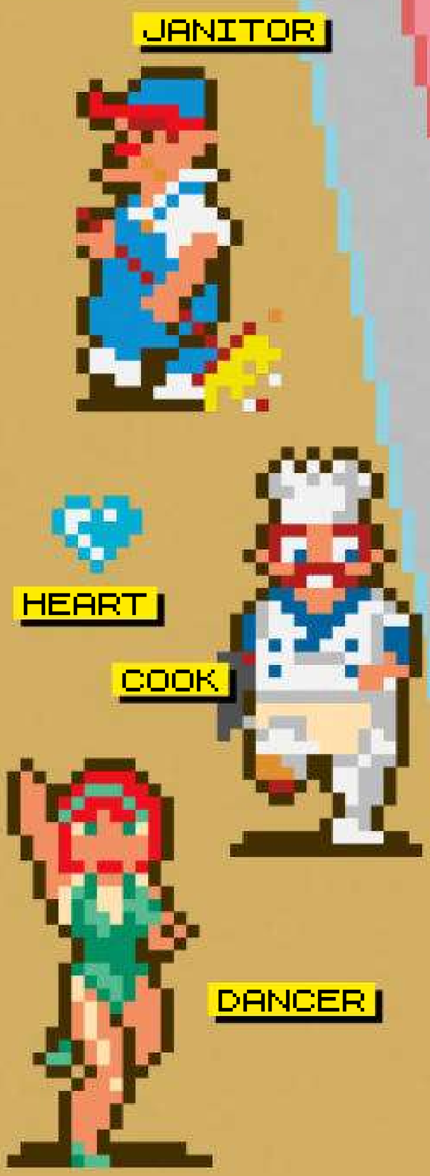
BRING ON THE DANCING GIRLS

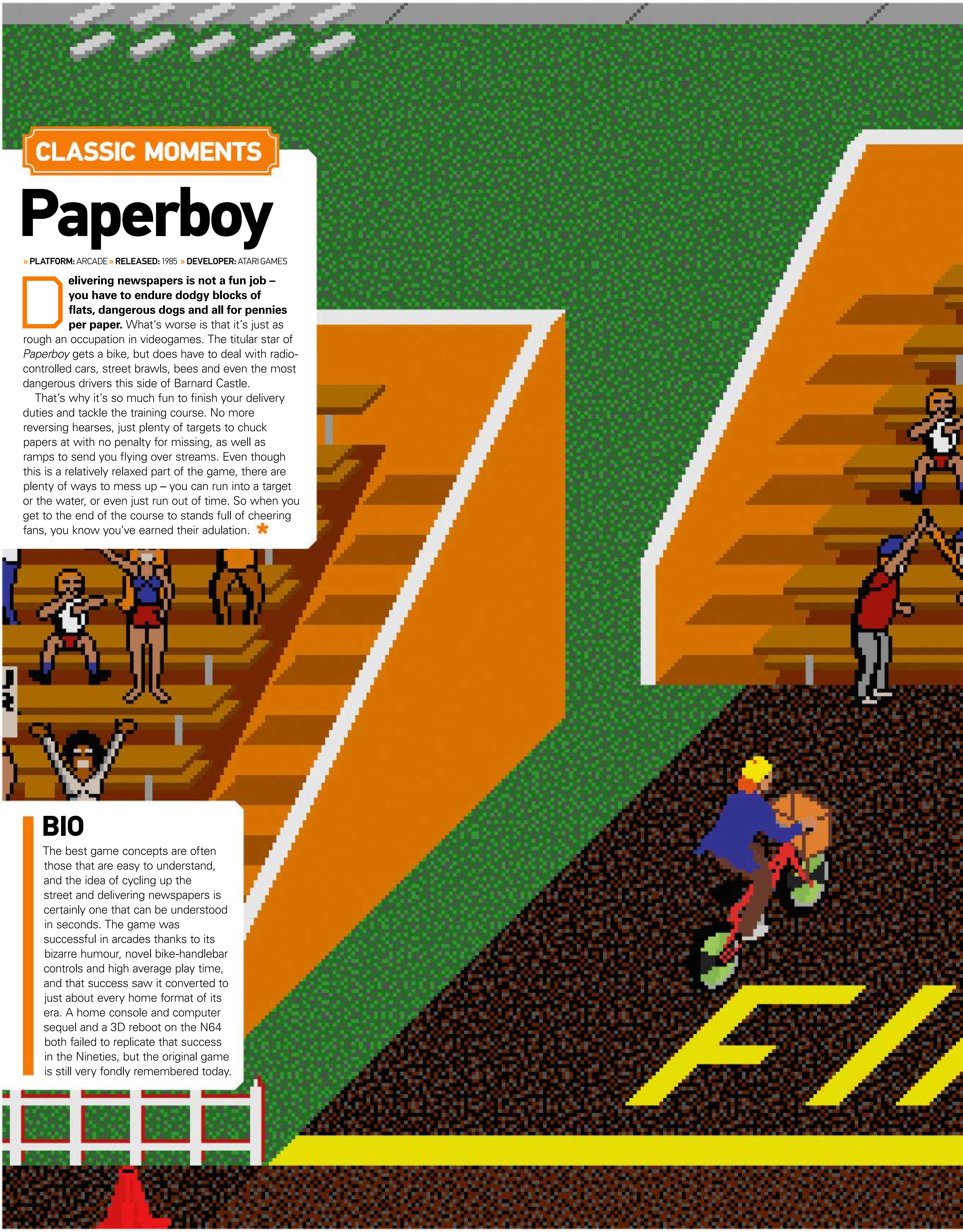
This loving homage to *Fame* is another tricky level in *Mikie*. While only one enemy will chase you – that teacher, again! – touching any of the dancers stuns Mikie for a few seconds. Pick your way around them carefully, discouraging the teacher whenever you are able to. Collect the hearts and enjoy *Twist And Shout*!



GARDEN CAPERS

We are outside the school now and Mikie is within touching distance of his beau. In his way patrol three jocks, each moving at a different speed, and all faster than the regular enemies. Cautiously navigate around each one, collecting the hearts as you go in order to reach your patient girlfriend. Mwah!





CLASSIC MOMENTS

Paperboy

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1985 » **DEVELOPER:** ATARI GAMES

Delivering newspapers is not a fun job – you have to endure dodgy blocks of flats, dangerous dogs and all for pennies per paper. What's worse is that it's just as rough an occupation in videogames. The titular star of *Paperboy* gets a bike, but does have to deal with radio-controlled cars, street brawls, bees and even the most dangerous drivers this side of Barnard Castle.

That's why it's so much fun to finish your delivery duties and tackle the training course. No more reversing hearses, just plenty of targets to chuck papers at with no penalty for missing, as well as ramps to send you flying over streams. Even though this is a relatively relaxed part of the game, there are plenty of ways to mess up – you can run into a target or the water, or even just run out of time. So when you get to the end of the course to stands full of cheering fans, you know you've earned their adulation. *

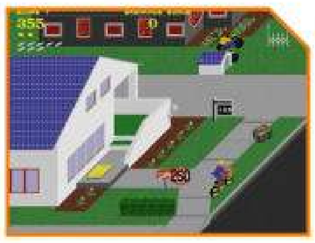
BIO

The best game concepts are often those that are easy to understand, and the idea of cycling up the street and delivering newspapers is certainly one that can be understood in seconds. The game was successful in arcades thanks to its bizarre humour, novel bike-handlebar controls and high average play time, and that success saw it converted to just about every home format of its era. A home console and computer sequel and a 3D reboot on the N64 both failed to replicate that success in the Nineties, but the original game is still very fondly remembered today.

I LUV U
PAPER
BOY
NISH

MORE CLASSIC PAPERBOY MOMENTS

Shot In The Box



We imagine British postal workers quite envy their American counterparts, given that they deal with mailboxes that don't require them to walk all the way to the house. Land a newspaper in this postal receptacle rather than the vague vicinity of the doormat and you'll earn yourself 250 points rather than 100, as well as a sense of smug satisfaction.

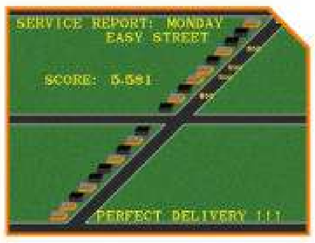
Get Smashed

Give a character a voice, and you give them a new layer of personality. Play that voice too often and you end up with a furball named Bubsy. That's the key with Atari's hero. If he gets wrecked by a speeding driver, he might say something like, "Sometimes, I hate this job," but he might not – and the next time he does, it'll be a different phrase.

Petty Vandalism

What should be done with someone who doesn't subscribe to the local newspaper? Why, they deserve a free sample to convince them to subscribe. It's not *your* fault that the publisher stipulates that such copies must only be delivered through closed windows. Fair warning, we're implementing this protection racke- erm, marketing campaign soon.

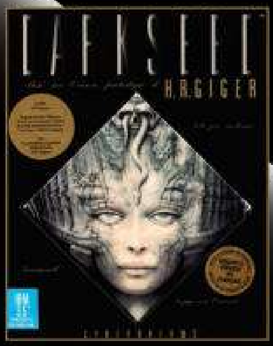
Paper Perfection



Miss a delivery, lose a subscriber. It's a harsh world out there, isn't it? It's easier to miss a house than you'd think too, as landing slightly to the left or right of the doorstep doesn't count as a successful delivery. That's why scoring a perfect day of deliveries is so satisfying – you really feel like you've done something special.

The Making of

DARK

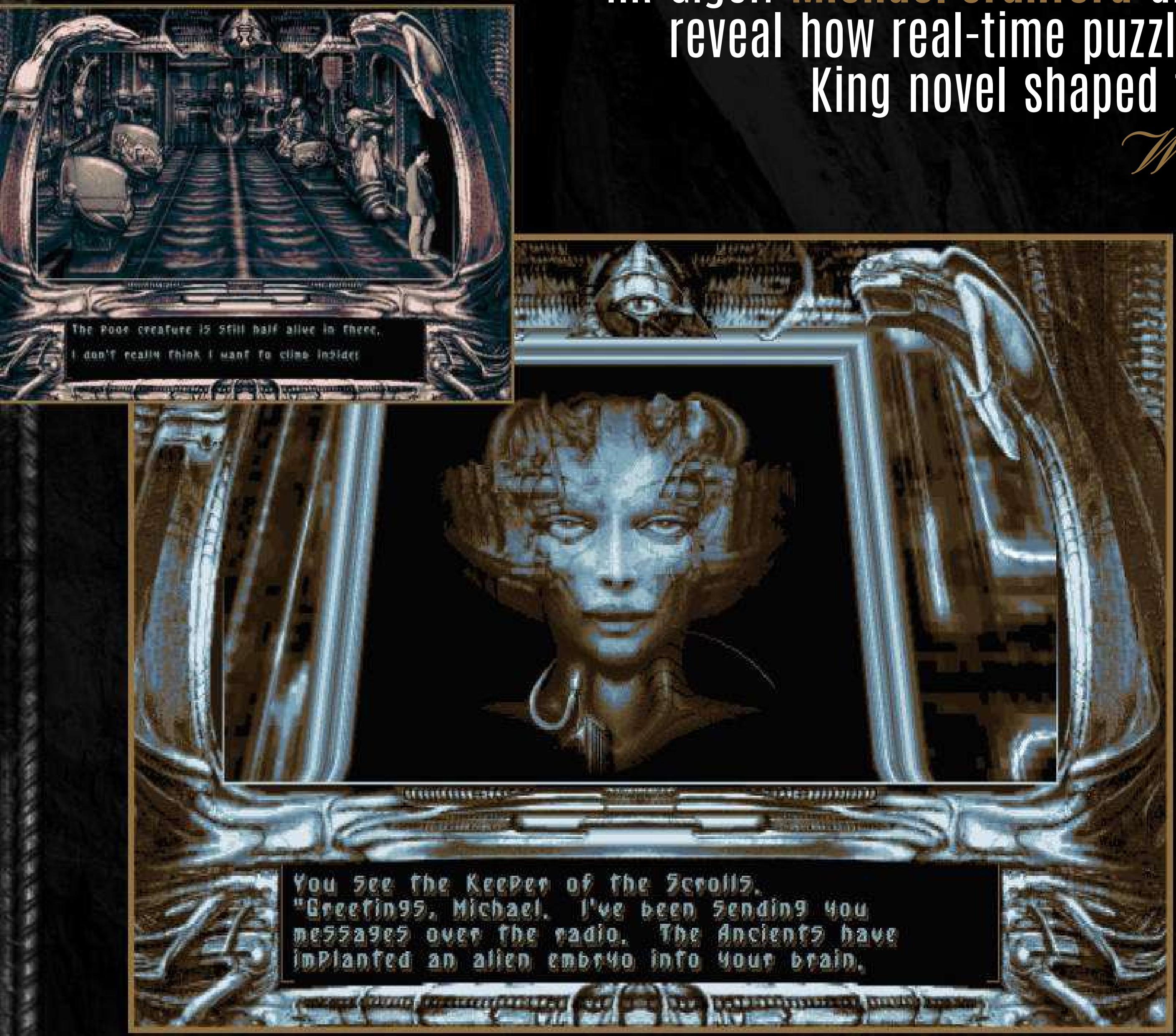


IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CYBERDREAMS
- » **DEVELOPER:** CYBERDREAMS
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PLATFORM:** PC, VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE

Cyberdreams' take on psychological horror was infamous for its dark subject matter, crushing difficulty and involvement of esteemed artist HR Giger. Michael Cranford and Joby Otero reveal how real-time puzzles and a Stephen King novel shaped this distinctive game

Words by Robert Zak



The poor creature is still half alive in there.
I don't really think I want to climb inside.

You see the Keeper of the Scrolls.
"Greetings, Michael. I've been sending you messages over the radio. The Ancients have implanted an alien embryo into your brain.

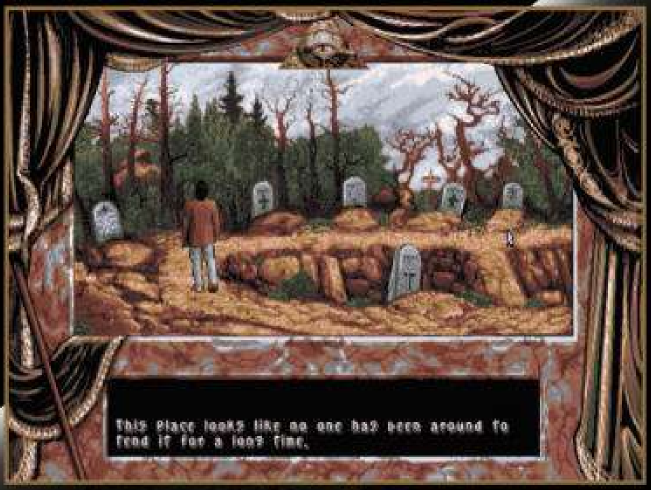
» [PC] Giger's 1974 painting Li II was used to represent the mysterious The Keeper Of The Scrolls in the game.

***Dark Seed* is a game as infamous for its difficulty as it is famous for its licensed use of the art of HR Giger.** At the same time as stumbling over just about every pitfall of Nineties adventure game design, it's memorable for its dark story, atmosphere and *that* intro which shows the protagonist having his forehead pulled open before an alien embryo gets planted inside.

Founded in 1990, game developer Cyberdreams would become renowned for attracting big-name talent, but often struggling to coagulate it into cohesive final products. Its games were deeply flawed but always fascinating, and nowhere is that tension more palpable than in its first game, *Dark Seed*.

Designer Michael Cranford, the creator of the first two *Bard's Tale* games, was a big name in the fledgling PC games industry at the turn of the Nineties, but was taking some time off to focus on his PhD in social ethics. He was brought on as a designer for *Dark Seed* before it had any kind of structure. "All I knew was that it was going to revolve around Giger's artwork and star this guy Mike Dawson [the game's

SEED


This place looks like no one has been around to tend it for a long time.

» [PC] The game's Light World settings still look great thanks to the tastefully dithered 16-colour palette.

co-designer who would later take over from Cranford] as the protagonist," Michael tells us. "It was really bizarre."

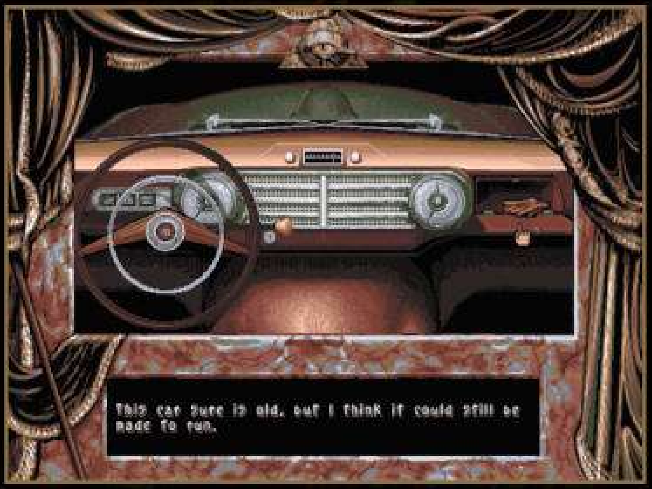
The reality behind Mike's star turn as the bewildered, alien-impregnated hero was somewhere between an in-joke and a financial decision. Mike used his name as a placeholder in a concept document and it ended up sticking, with Mike ultimately being digitised and used for the game proper. It also saved the studio money on having to hire an actor.

Michael worked remotely on *Dark Seed*. While this suited his circumstances at the time, it was also a challenge. "It was very much just me sitting at my kitchen table with graph paper, writing out pages of content and doing sketches," he says. "I'd always worked with a group of guys around me, where I could say, 'Hey, come over and look at what I've got. What do you think?' It was a very unusual experience."

At his kitchen table, Michael mapped out the game structure, which would be comprised of two mirrored worlds: a Light World set in the sleepy town of Woodland Hills, and a Dark World, which is where Giger's art came in – a cold nether realm where flesh doesn't exist without the intrusion of metal, spinal towers loom over barren dreamscapes and hostile alien beings with no regard for humanity patrol the land.

Michael wasn't a huge horror fan, having only watched Ridley Scott's *Alien* after being pressured into it by friends. Nevertheless, he knew how to make the player feel ill at ease. "Shortly before starting on *Dark Seed*, I'd read Stephen King's book *The Tommyknockers*, and you'll definitely see some overlap with the game," he reveals. King's book is about an alien ship buried in the woods near a small town, which begins to telepathically control the local population. In *Dark Seed*, the latter portions see the alien 'Ancients' take control of the town's police force in their bid to stop Mike from destroying their power source. Both the book and the game end with the hostile craft being forced to depart back into space.

Michael also came to *Dark Seed* with a fascination for real-time puzzles. He was inspired by the Eighties Infocom text adventure *Deadline*, which gave you a time limit in which to solve a murder. He later incorporated some time-based puzzles into ▶

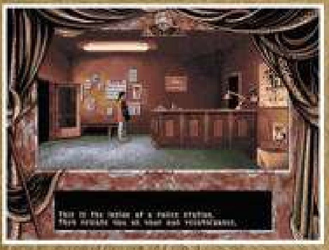

This car sure is old, but I think it could still be made to run.

POINT AND TIPS

USEFUL HINTS TO START YOU OFF

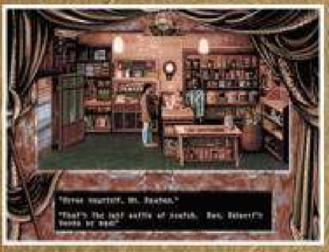
***Dark Seed* is an obscure and unforgiving game, even by the standards of the time. Certain story-progressing events won't trigger if you do or don't do certain things (even if they're seemingly unrelated), and you can lock yourself off from completing the game very early on without knowing it. Here are some hints on how to overcome some of the junctures at which you're most likely to walk yourself into an irreversible dead end.**

GUN SHY



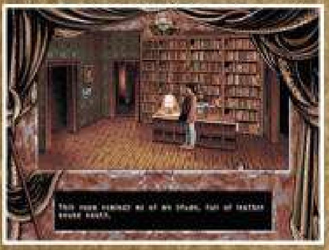
■ Whatever you do, do not take the gun from the police station before you get arrested. If you do decide to do so, don't say that we didn't warn you.

FRIENDS FOREVER



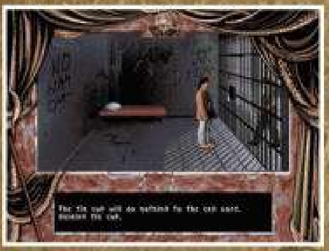
■ The shop sells sardines, soy sauce and scotch. Just think about which one of these is the best way to make friends in a town populated by lonely men…

LOOK AGAIN

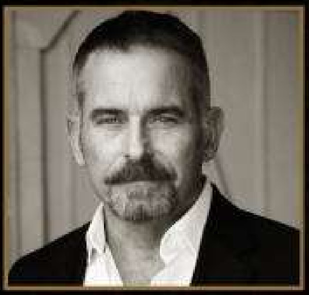


■ Interactive objects are often ineligible against the background, especially a particularly important one you should grab early on in the library.

STASH TIME

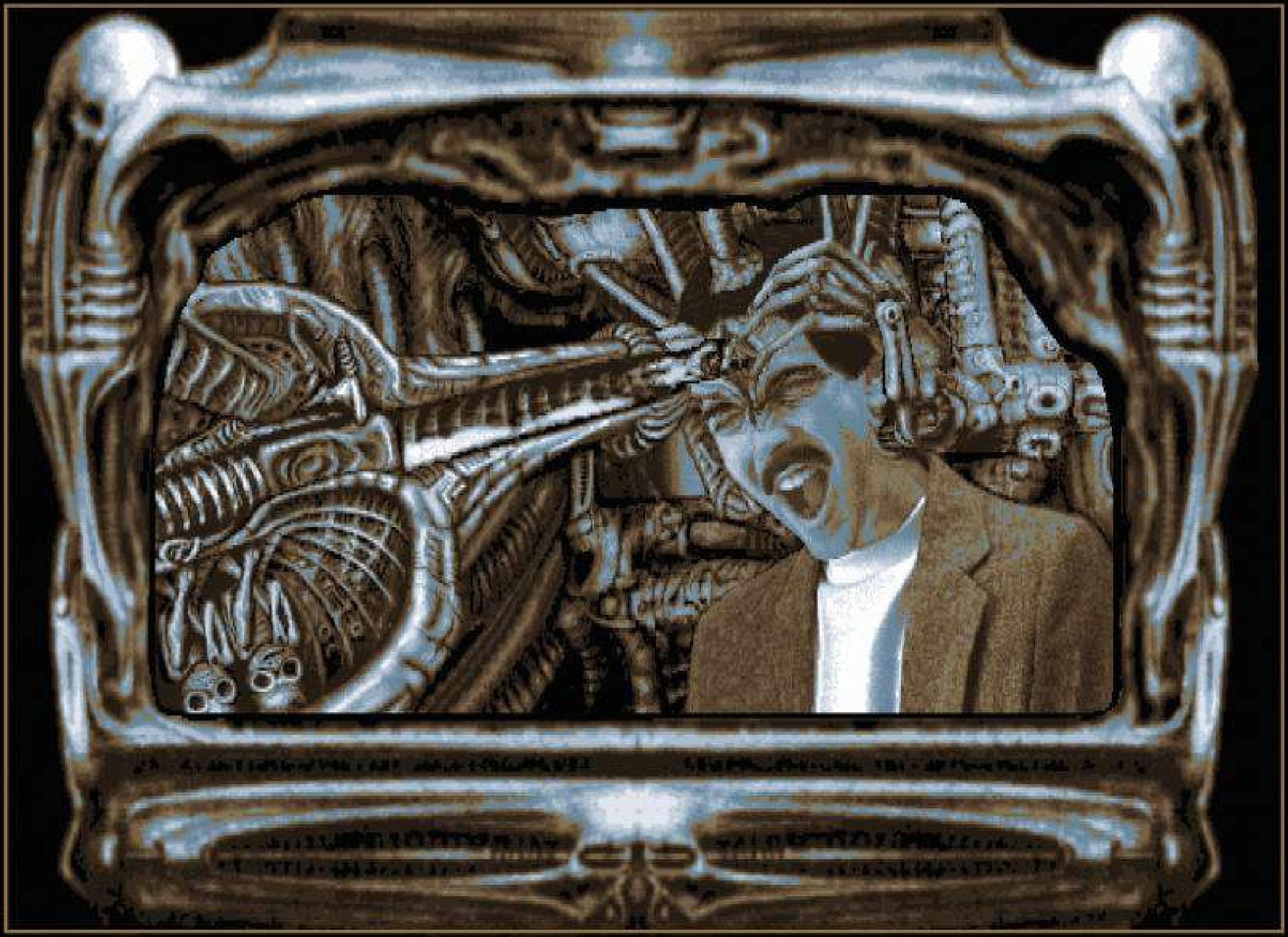


■ One of the game's more interesting mechanics is the ability to stash items in one world then pick them up in the other. Bear this in mind when in the police cell.



» Michael Cranford is a pioneer videogame designer, programmer, ethicist and software architect.

» After *Dark Seed*, Joby Otero went on to help run studios like Neversoft and Shiny Entertainment.



> “All I knew was that it was going to revolve around Giger’s artwork and star this guy Mike Dawson”
>
> **Michael Cranford**

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CYBERRACE
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1993

I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1995

DARK SEED II
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1995

his 1990 RPG *Centauri Alliance*. With *Dark Seed*, however, he would go even further: he would turn the whole game into a single real-time puzzle.

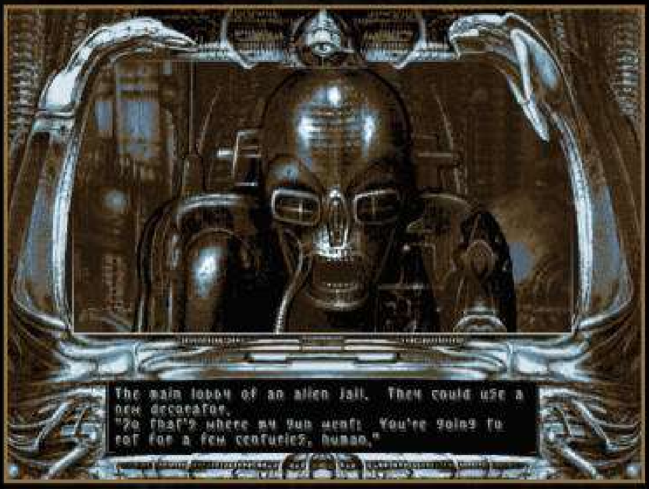
“I thought it would be a great vehicle for the horror element, kind of like you’re watching a horror movie,” he tells us. “You can’t just pause the movie if you’re a character in the movie, right? It offers that sense of stress and immersion, that sense of, ‘I gotta make it through to daybreak.’” The idea was accepted, and soon programmer Lennard Feddersen had updated the game engine to support a persistent in-game timer.

For artist Joby Otero, Cyberdreams marked his big break into the games industry when he joined in 1991. Describing himself as a “nerdy kid with weird clothing and a furry pimp hat”, his art style was inspired by the biomechanical and the psychedelic. “On my first day, I just brought in this loose bag of crazy artwork that looked like Hieronymus Bosch meets Dali meets MC Escher,” he tells us. “I was a huge Giger fan, and didn’t initially know they were working on something involving him.”

Joby’s idiosyncratic fashion sense was a fine fit for the office environment of Cyberdreams. Art director Bernd Brummbaer (who worked out of a tiny office that Joby affectionately called ‘The Brumm Closet’) was one of the first people he met. “He emerged from his shadowy office dressed all in this very casual white linen suit with a white wide-brim hat and this very thick German accent,” Joby recalls. “He looked like something from an *Indiana Jones* movie, but we hit it off right away.”

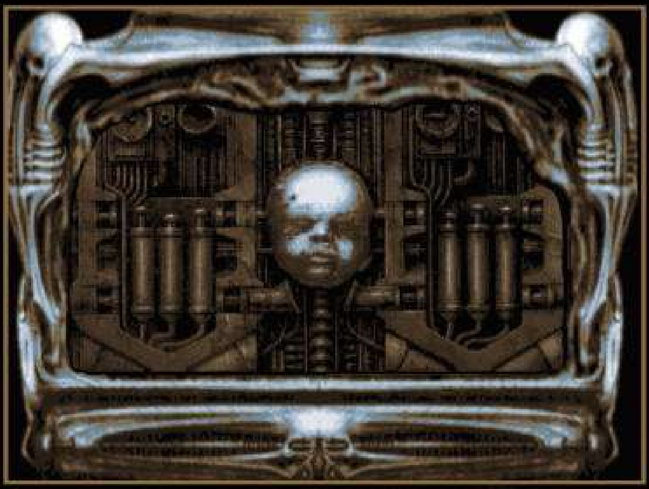
The internal Cyberdreams team was small, and the office was quiet and unusually dark. “I later learned this was partly because artists like to work in the dark so that the pixels jump off the screen,” Joby tells us. “It actually means that you tend to make artwork that’s too dark though, which was particularly problematic on a game like *Dark Seed*, where the whole vibe is very dark. We had to tweak the art a lot later on because of that.”

Joby began working on *Dark Seed* when it had been in development for at least six months, and immediately faced a unique challenge. At a time when most VGA games utilised 256 colours and a 320x200 pixel resolution, Giger’s one major intervention in the game’s development saw him demand that it be rendered at 640x350. *Dark Seed* became one of the first ever games to use such a high resolution, but the technical strain of this meant that the colour palette had to be reeled back to 16 colours.



The main lobby of an alien jail. They could use a new decorator.
"So that's where my gun went. You're going to rot for a few centuries, human."

» [PC] You’ll meet all manner of dark and twisted characters in *Dark Seed*, so be on your best behaviour.



» [PC] There are some truly upsetting visuals in *Dark Seed* and they’re enhanced by HR Giger’s insistence on a high resolution.

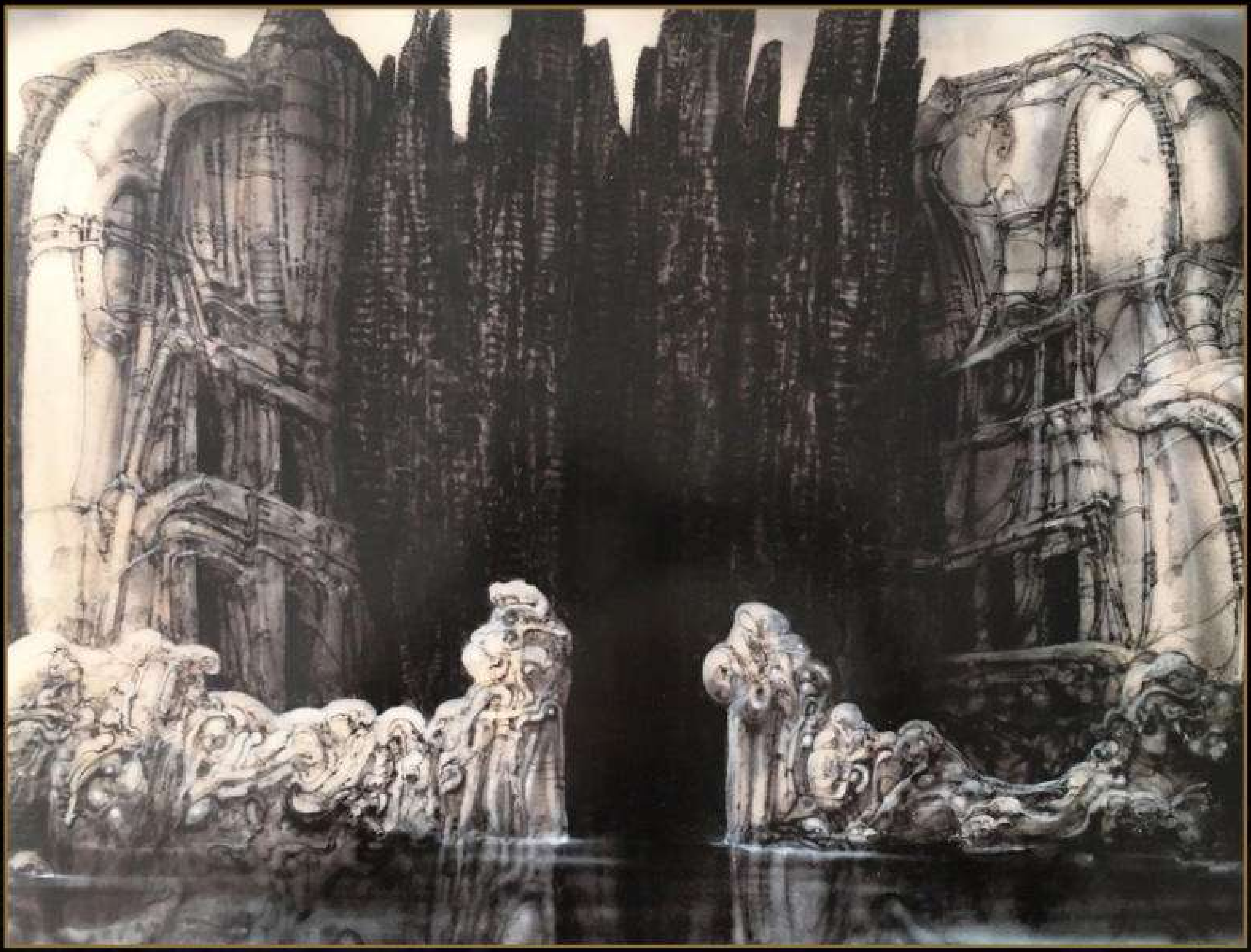
This made sense for the Dark World, which, true to Giger, was monochromatic, but it was tougher for the Light World. The team used a tried-and-tested technique called dithering to imbue the game’s Light World scenes with an impressive amount of texture and depth. “Dithering was pretty common at the time for 8-bit games. It’s basically this technique where each adjacent pixel you would use a different colour from your palette,” Joby says. “We’d do these almost stippling patterns that would let you do gradients if they needed to span a lot of the screen, creating an impression of much more than 16 colours.”

Creating the game’s Dark World scenes based around Giger’s art was a rewarding experience for Joby, but it wasn’t just a case of slapping Giger’s works in the background. “We would find Giger artwork with pieces that could be conducive to the kind of composition that we needed for any given screen, then we would take those bits and pieces of those scans and use different tricks and Deluxe Paint to create a composition,” Joby says. “We’d rarely use the scans as is. More often we’d use these organic shapes into which we would fill the scan then build up some kind of object then copy-paste that object to create our rooms.”

The result was a fascinating fusion of Giger’s art with that of the game artists’. Many Dark World scenes were made from the ground up, heavily sticking to the Giger style but not directly using his work. Other scenes, like the cave in the Dark World and the nightmare Mike has on the third day when his head changes into a skull, use Giger’s work more directly.

Your main ally in the game meanwhile, The Keeper Of The Scrolls, is an almost unaltered take on Giger’s 1974 painting Li II, which depicts the artist’s former lover as a serpentine biomechanical demon.

It would be natural for an artist to be precious about their work being modified and merged into a videogame, but Joby says that Giger rarely intervened and was delighted with how it turned out. While Joby didn’t get to meet Giger in person, he shared an anecdote



» [PC] This background merges parts of Giger's *Hommage à Böcklin* painting into a scene created by the game's artists

that revealed a little bit of the man behind the nightmarish art. "For someone's birthday, Giger faxed over a little birthday card he drew, covered in bunnies and birthday cake – nothing like his usual stuff," Joby reminisces. "It just really touched me because it resonated with me that he had this dark side but was also a very childlike character in other ways."

While the art department embraced their unique mission, the game's design was far more problematic. Michael's structure and time limit remained in the game, but his contract was not renewed to see out the development and refine it. "I think they just felt like 'we got this' at the end, and I wasn't there for the tuning phase of the game."

The result is the unforgiving beast we know today. Interactive items blend with the scenery (a tiny 11-pixel bobby pin, for example, or a watch with the exact same colour as the floor), interesting mechanics – like the ability to stash certain items in one world and pick them up in another – go unexplained, and there are multiple points where you can lock yourself off from completing the game without triggering a fail state, leaving you lingering in limbo without realising you've lost. Michael rues not getting the chance to refine the game he designed. "I would've implemented some kind of positive payoff if you hit a dead end or didn't do something in the right time frame," he says. "Your failure should be a learning experience. I would've put in clues – maybe a dream sequence or something." Despite not being there for the final part of development, with the game's star Mike Dawson finishing the process, Michael takes responsibility for its notorious obscurity, while finding a fitting analogy for his dissatisfaction with the development process, "It was like you stepped through a mirror to a different world and everything and everybody was a little off," he concludes.

Back at Cyberdreams HQ, Joby's experience was arguably even stranger than Michael's. Once the game went gold his role on *Dark Seed* took an unexpected turn. "The game boxes shipped in flat so we had to unpack them, unfold them into full 3D boxes and stuff the disks that we just duplicated in there then shrink-wrap them ourselves," he laughs.

"We were also doing customer service calls. At one point, someone's grandmother bought the game for her grandson, and she says, 'I'm stuck during installation. It says 'put in disk two,'" he recalls. "It turned out she hadn't taken disk one out."

Once Otero and his fellow developers had done everything from hand-painting the in-game art to hand-packing the boxes for distribution, *Dark Seed* shipped. For all its flaws, the game was a resounding success and would later become a cult hit. Even though Joby didn't get to work with Giger directly, by modifying, morphing and drawing directly on his work, he got to experience an intimate artistic connection with one of his idols.

"To try to create stuff that was representative of him, and knowing that he's going to see it and approve it ultimately was just gigantic," he concludes. "I couldn't have hoped for more in my first game gig." *

A DARK LEGACY

DARK SEED'S PORTS AND SEQUELS

In an unusually prolific streak for a PC point-and-click game, *Dark Seed* spread across the home computer platforms (Amiga, Macintosh) the Amiga CD32, and even came to Sega and Sony's shiny new consoles in 1994, over two years after its original launch. The Amiga version had a superior soundtrack to the PC version, albeit without voiced dialogue, while the Amiga CD32 version had voiced dialogue and a richer music track.

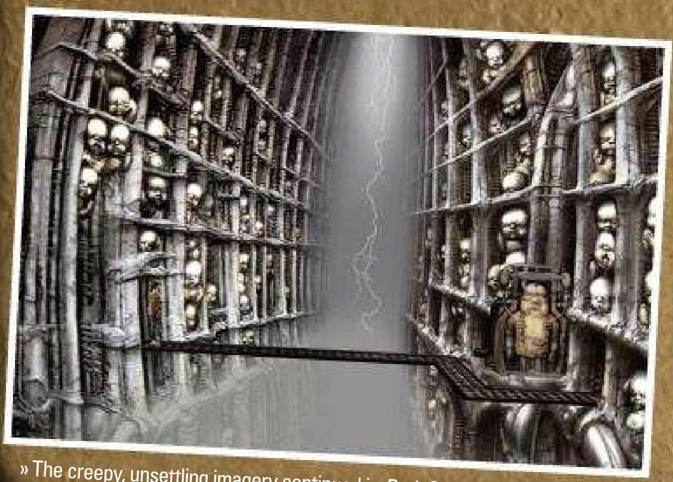
The PlayStation and Saturn versions only came out in Japan, with the former having the highest-quality sound across all versions of the game. Interestingly, both console versions, however, were lower-resolution than the PC original, therefore deviating from Giger's demand that the game use a higher resolution.

Visually, *Dark Seed* was an advanced game for its time, and an 8-bit Nintendo version probably wasn't a priority for a studio that had its eyes on launching the game for upcoming 32-bit consoles. But thanks to Chinese studio Mars Production (best known for pirate-porting *Pokémon Gold* to the NES in 1999), a heavily diluted version of the game came to Nintendo's seminal Eighties console as well.

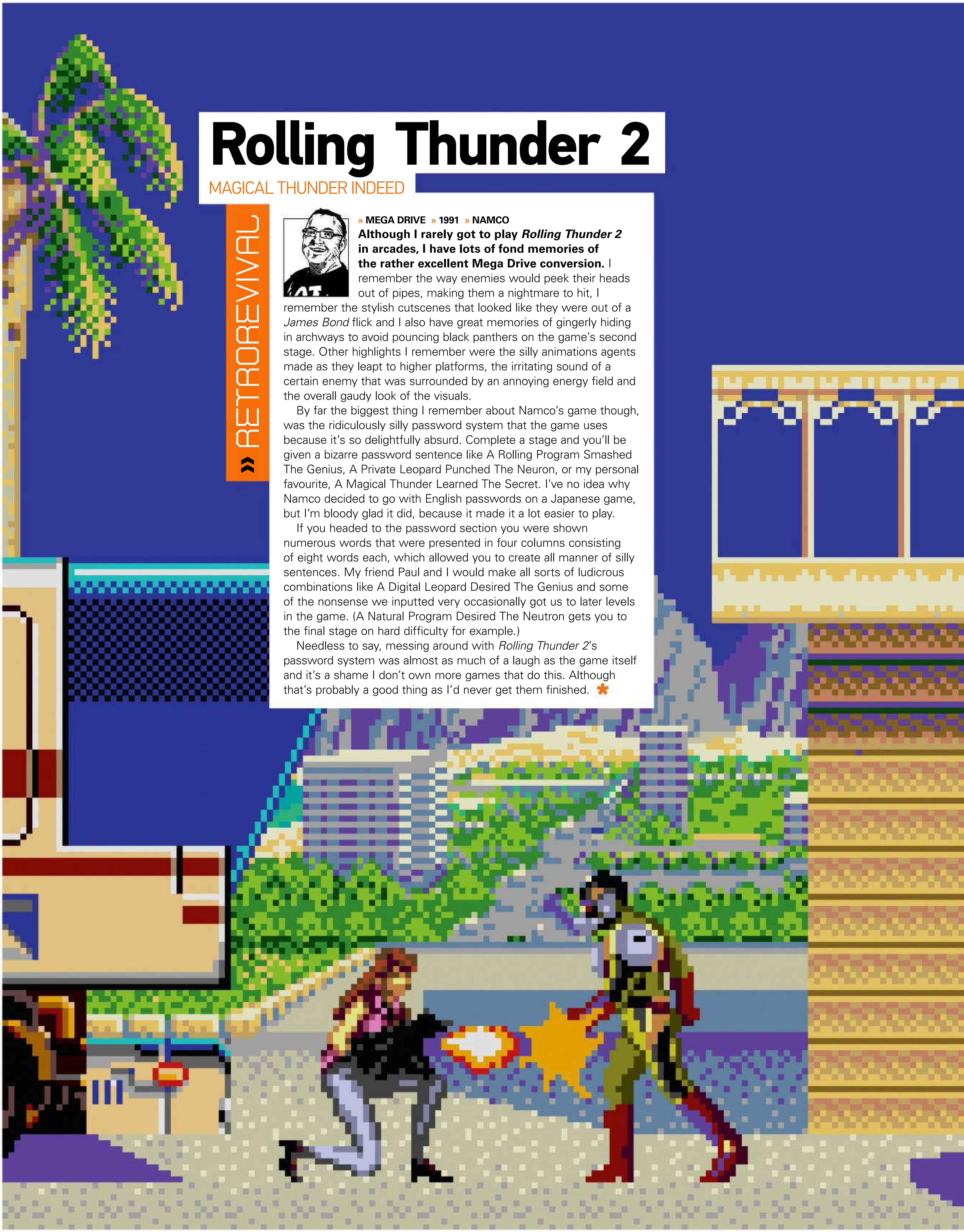
The unlicensed game had a maddening 15-second loop of classical composer Carl Czerny's *Op 821 No 61* (whose music was also used in *Pokémon Gold*), a brown colour palette and graphics simplified from the Amiga version. A terrible game by any objective measure, but nonetheless fascinating. On the bright side, the sparse environments made key items more visible and some of the awkward puzzles easier to solve.

The mid-Nineties was the golden age of uncanny-valley digitisation and FMV, which was a natural fit for *Dark Seed*. The sequel, *Dark Seed II*, sees Mike Dawson make a return, this time in his hometown of Crowley, Texas, following the murder of his childhood sweetheart.

The game is bigger, stranger and had even more involvement from Giger, who again provided his existing art for integration but this time wanted to also include imagery that, according to the manual "had recently been haunting him". This included the image of a sled carrying a vat down a seemingly endless staircase, inspired by his *Shaft* series.



» The creepy, unsettling imagery continued in *Dark Seed II*.



Rolling Thunder 2

MAGICAL THUNDER INDEED

» MEGA DRIVE » 1991 » NAMCO

Although I rarely got to play *Rolling Thunder 2* in arcades, I have lots of fond memories of the rather excellent Mega Drive conversion. I remember the way enemies would peek their heads out of pipes, making them a nightmare to hit, I remember the stylish cutscenes that looked like they were out of a *James Bond* flick and I also have great memories of gingerly hiding in archways to avoid pouncing black panthers on the game's second stage. Other highlights I remember were the silly animations agents made as they leapt to higher platforms, the irritating sound of a certain enemy that was surrounded by an annoying energy field and the overall gaudy look of the visuals.

By far the biggest thing I remember about Namco's game though, was the ridiculously silly password system that the game uses because it's so delightfully absurd. Complete a stage and you'll be given a bizarre password sentence like A Rolling Program Smashed The Genius, A Private Leopard Punched The Neuron, or my personal favourite, A Magical Thunder Learned The Secret. I've no idea why Namco decided to go with English passwords on a Japanese game, but I'm bloody glad it did, because it made it a lot easier to play.

If you headed to the password section you were shown numerous words that were presented in four columns consisting of eight words each, which allowed you to create all manner of silly sentences. My friend Paul and I would make all sorts of ludicrous combinations like A Digital Leopard Desired The Genius and some of the nonsense we inputted very occasionally got us to later levels in the game. (A Natural Program Desired The Neutron gets you to the final stage on hard difficulty for example.)

Needless to say, messing around with *Rolling Thunder 2*'s password system was almost as much of a laugh as the game itself and it's a shame I don't own more games that do this. Although that's probably a good thing as I'd never get them finished. *

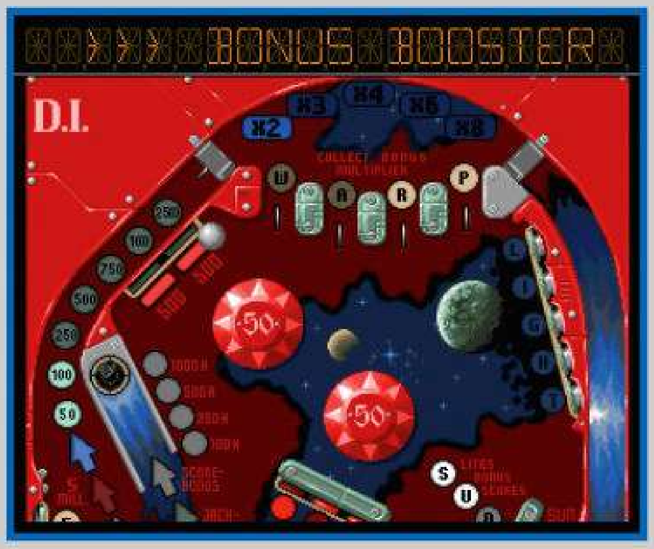
BULLET

ULTIMATE GUIDE

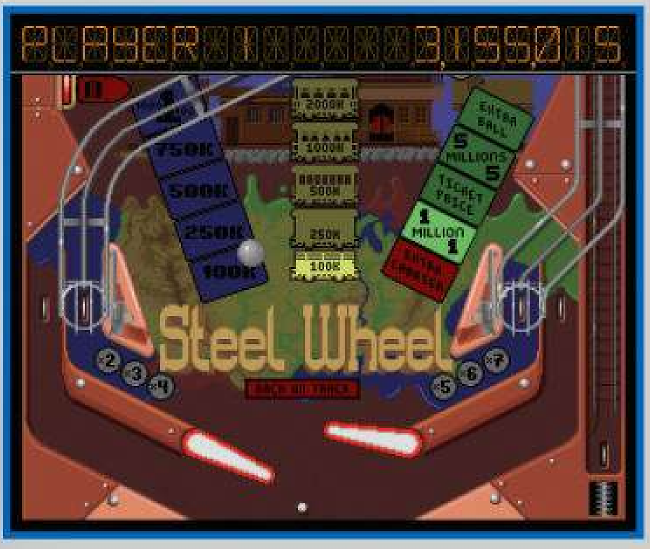
pinball DREAMS

There's nothing like a great pinball game – and before Pinball Dreams, Amiga owners had nothing like a great pinball game. We look back at the game that set Digital Illusions up for future success and made pinball wizards of us all

WORDS BY NICK THORPE



» [Amiga] The scoreboard at the top of the screen will regularly inform you of features like the 'Bonus Booster'.



» [Amiga] Steel Wheel's bonus features focus on things associated with trains, like tickets and carriages.

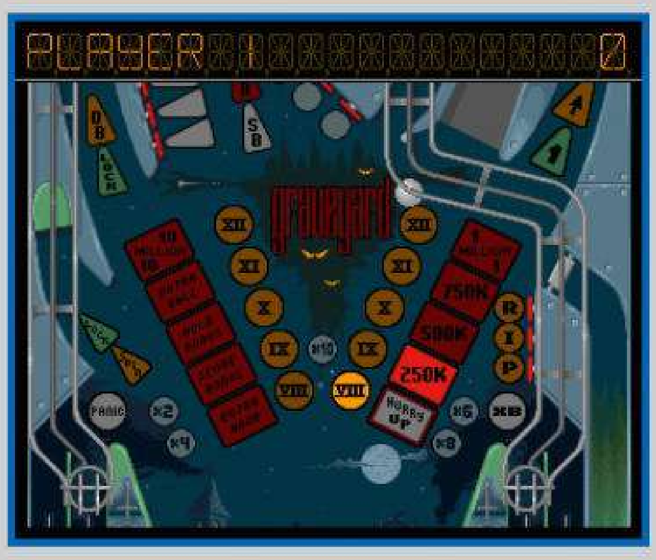
Pinball and videogames have always enjoyed a fairly close relationship, owing to their shared historical status as coin-operated amusements – and to some, social menace. In fact, if you think politicians and the media are taking a long time to accept videogames, it's worth noting that the city of Kokomo in Indiana, USA, only officially lifted its ban on pinball machines in 2016, 40 years after New York and Chicago did the same. Pinball videogames first arrived soon after the lifting of those bans in the Seventies, and by the early Nineties we'd received some true classics including *Pinball Construction Set* and *Devil Crash*.

Up to this point, Amiga pinball games had been OK. *Time Scanner* and *Pinball Magic* were the best available, but neither of them were pinball simulations as such because both games used video pinball's greatest trick – the ability to travel through a variety of interconnected tables. Although both games had received reasonable reviews, neither of them had quite nailed the ball physics in the way that the greatest pinball videogames do, and both struggled to convey the length of a pinball table. *Time Scanner* would pause to scroll as the ball moved between upper and lower sections of the table, while *Pinball Magic* crammed everything into a single screen. It's fair to say that there was a gap in the market for a more authentic pinball experience.

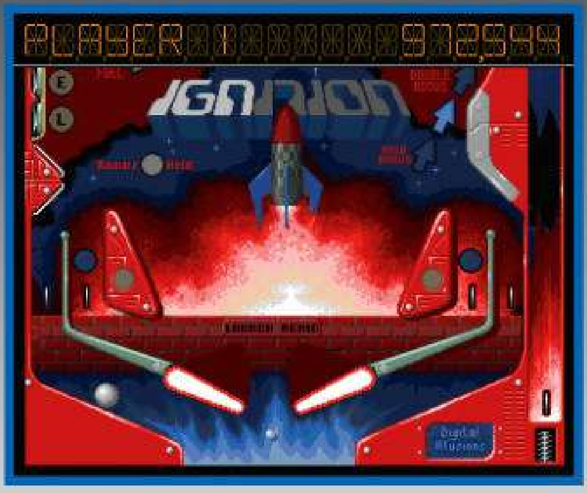
> "WE WANTED TO MOVE ON FROM JUST MAKING DEMOS, AND A GAME SEEMED LIKE THE ONLY REASONABLE NEXT STEP"
> **ANDREAS AXELSSON**

The situation changed drastically when a group of demo scene coders that had been part of the group The Silents decided that they wanted to move into game development. Digital Illusions was the new company set up for this purpose, based in Sweden. Andreas Axelsson was the programmer, Markus Nyström handled the graphics, Olof Gustafsson was the musician and resident pinball expert of the group, and Ulf Mandorff worked on the ball physics. The team was coordinated by Fredrik Liliegren, and Barry Simpson served as the producer from the game's publisher, 21st Century Entertainment.

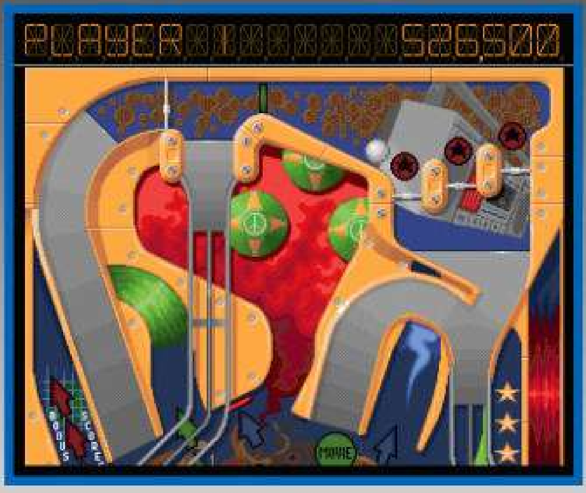
Digital Illusions created *Pinball Dreams* as its very first game. It was a more traditional pinball game than its Amiga contemporaries, with the most realistic ball physics of any game on the platform at the time. The game offered four tables, all of which are original creations for the game, rather than being licensed from major pinball manufacturers as is common today. As well as carrying very distinct visual identities, each of the four tables – Ignition, Steel Wheel, Beat Box and Nightmare – offered a different type of pinball experience. You could opt for the



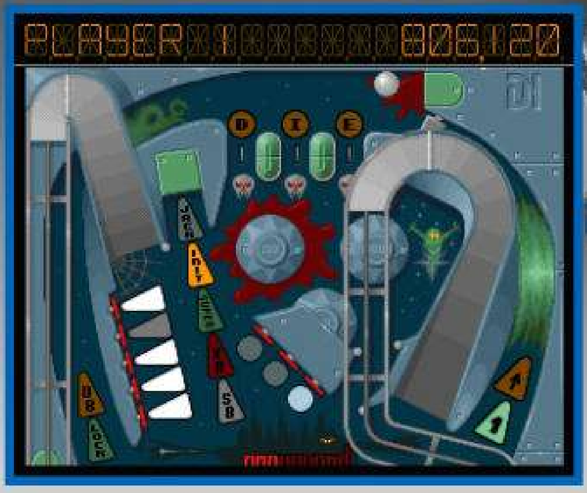
» [Amiga] Nightmare's an easy table to trip up on, as the ball is launched straight into the middle of the table.



» [Amiga] Drat, that's a ball gone. The blow is softened only slightly by the promise of bonus points to be calculated afterwards.



» [Amiga] Accessing this upper section is quite tricky since it's so easy to struggle with ramps.



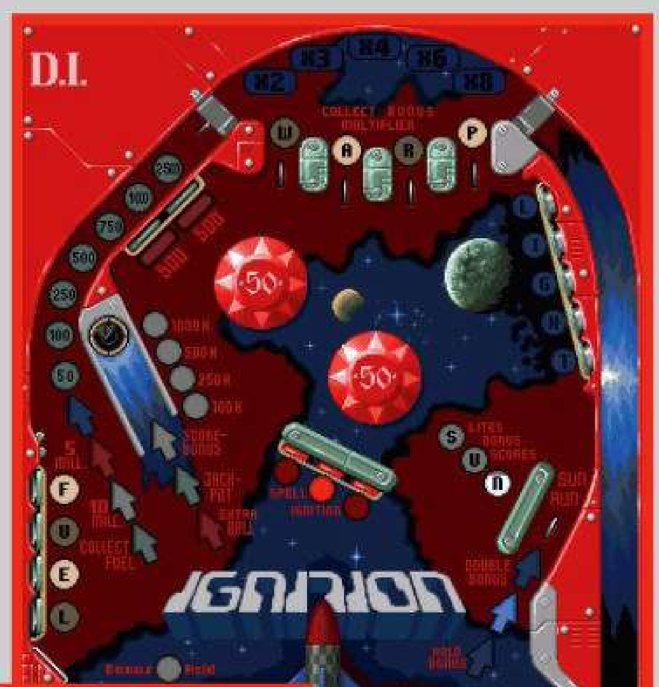
» [Amiga] With so many targets positioned in strategic places, the left lane is really the best way to access the top of Nightmare.

RUN THE TABLES

HERE ARE EACH OF THE FOUR TABLES YOU'LL ENCOUNTER IN PINBALL DREAMS, AND THEIR UNIQUE FEATURES

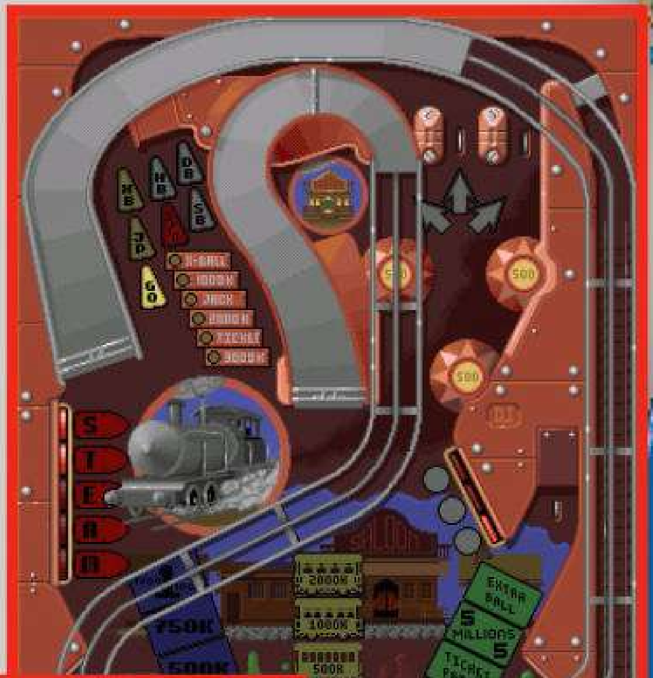
IGNITION

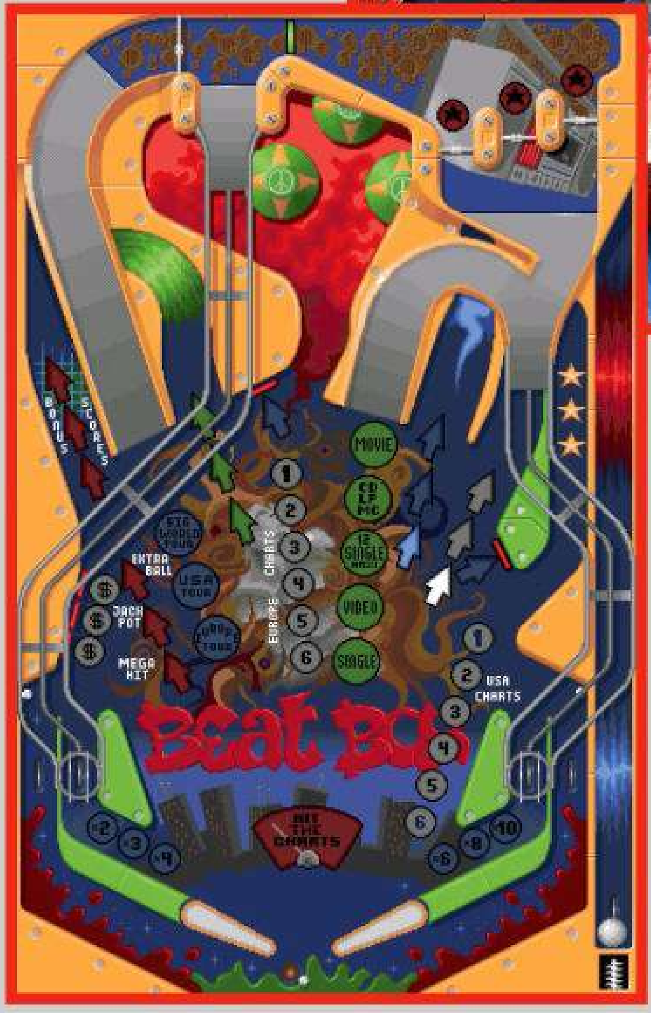
Ignition is a table themed around space exploration that is arguably the simplest of the lot, which is probably for the best since it's at the top of the list of tables and therefore the first that most players will try. There are no ramps at all on this table, but there are plenty of stationary targets though, as well as a tricky hole on the left of the table that can award an extra ball if hit.



STEEL WHEEL

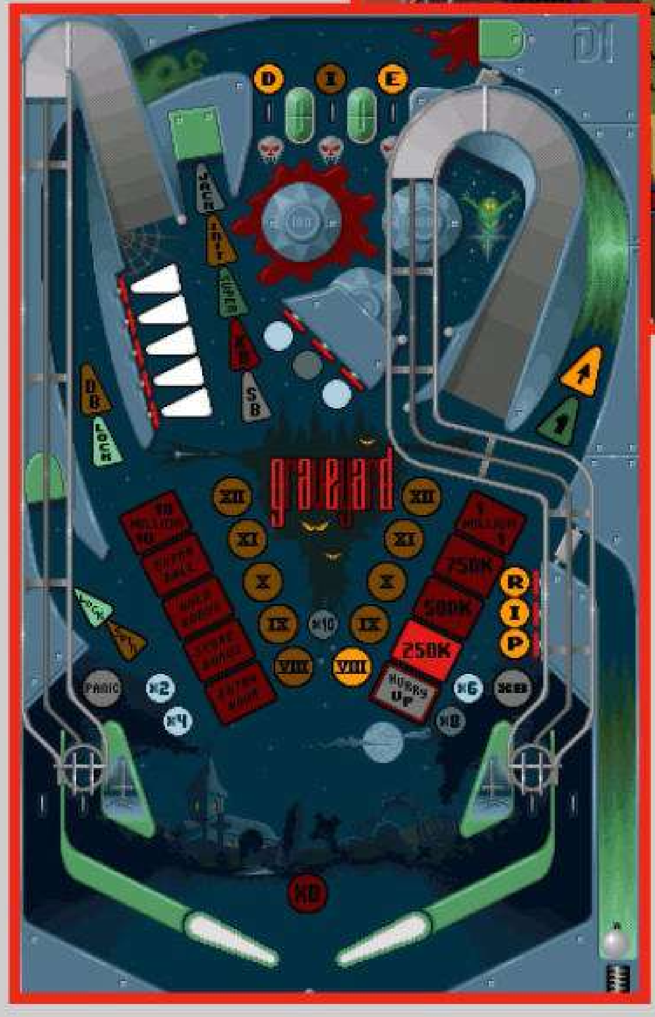
The golden age of steam locomotion provides the theme for this decidedly brown table. With practice, you should be able to repeatedly run the ramp on the left of the table, whereas the central one is a little trickier. The bonus lane on the right is relatively easy to hit, but the more lucrative one in the top left will require some real skill to hit consistently.





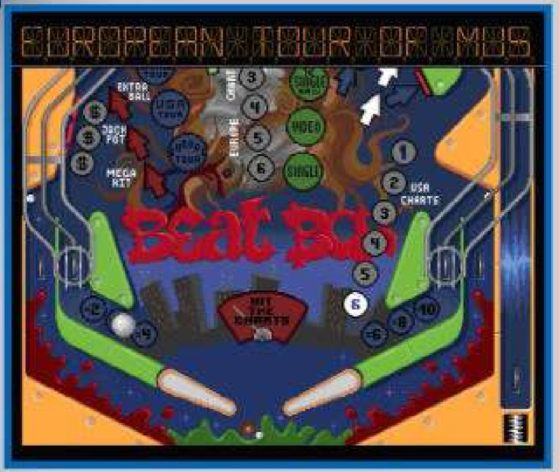
BEAT BOX

Beat Box will test your ability to accurately shoot for ramps and lanes. It has the most complex ramp setup of the four tables, as one ramp has two exit points and the other has two entry ways. You're really going to rely on them, as getting up into the bumpers can be tricky and there aren't too many other targets to be aiming for.

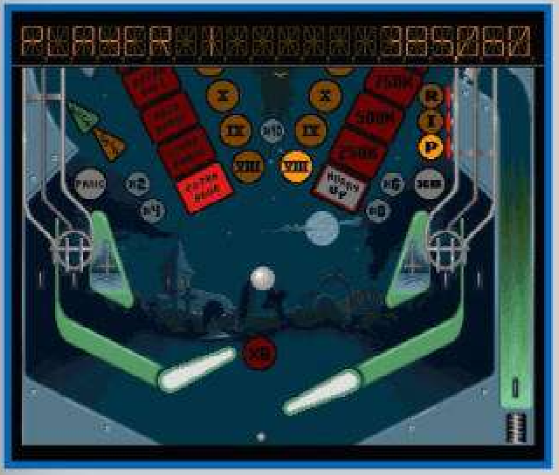


NIGHTMARE/ GRAVEYARD

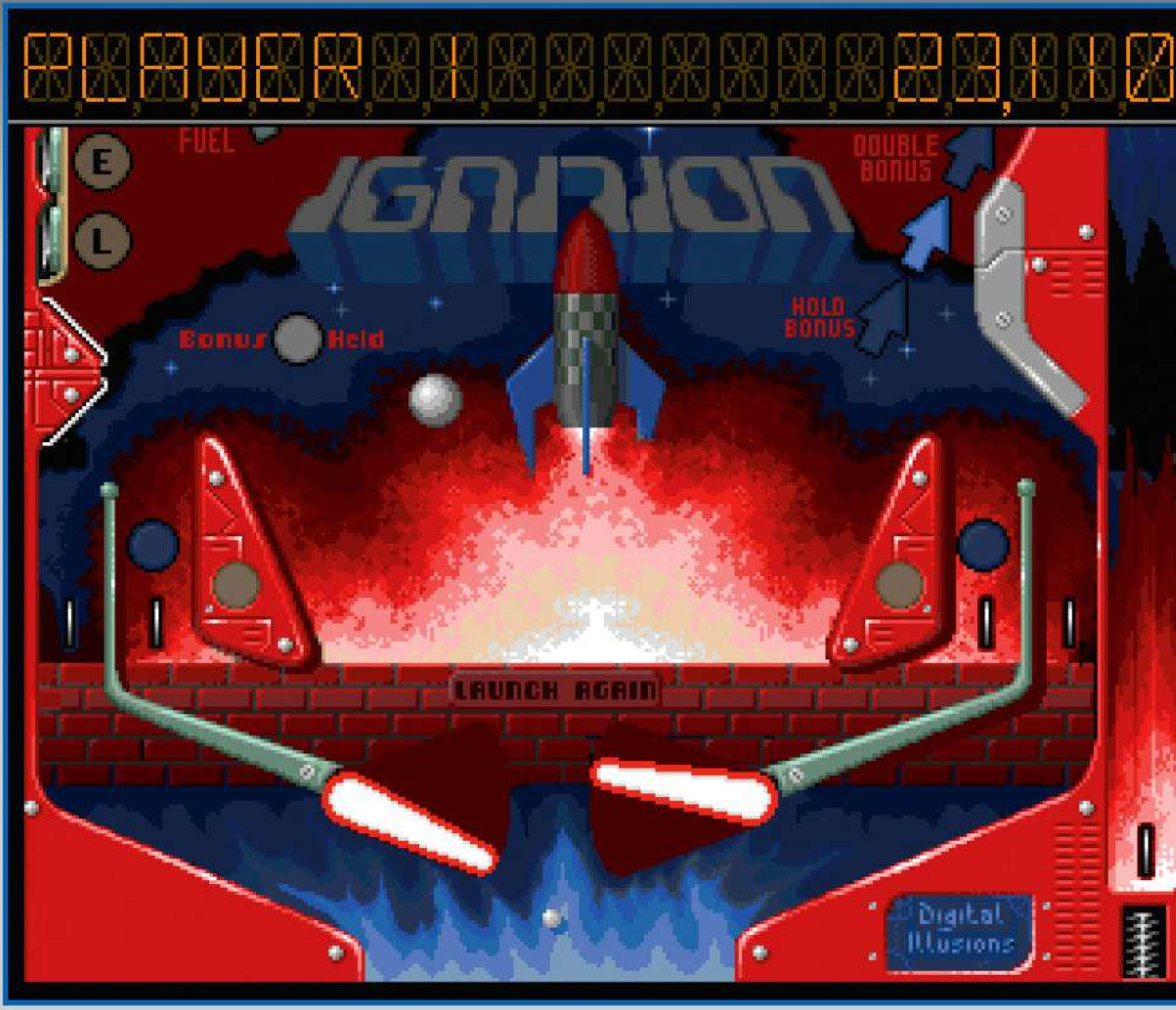
The name of this one will depend on your version of the game. Thankfully the layout doesn't change, as this is a fast-paced table that sets you up to run the left and right ramps consecutively, or loop the top of the table via the right lane. This is the only table in the game with a short launch path that puts you in the middle of the playfield, so watch out for that.



» [Amiga] Beat Box is themed around scoring hits and going on tour – a European one, according to the score board.

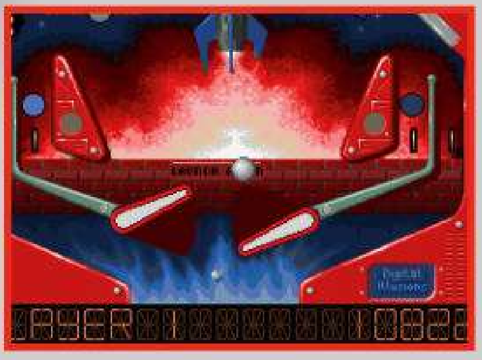


» [Amiga] We've just managed to save the ball from dropping out of play here – a tense moment indeed.



» [Amiga] The rocket blasting off gives you all the information you need to work out this table's theme.

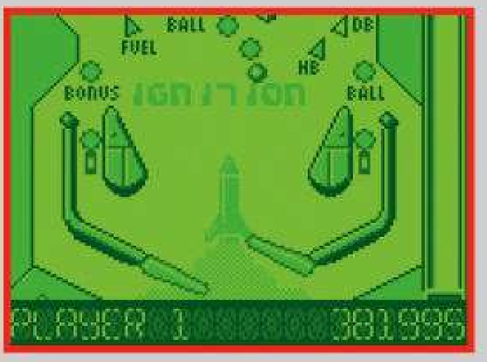
CONVERSION CAPERS



PC

Year 1993

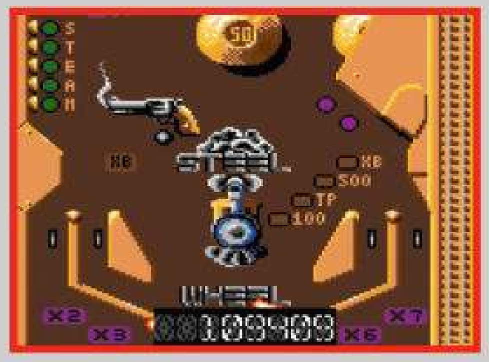
The PC version is faithful to the Amiga original in the graphical department, and it includes all four tables. You do lose some vertical visibility due to the 320x200 resolution which isn't ideal, and though the soundtrack is well represented across sound cards, the Amiga's music is still preferable.



GAME BOY

Year 1993

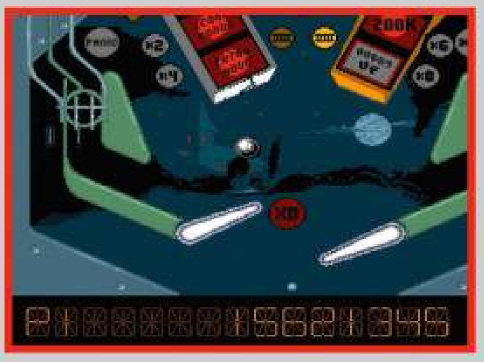
This handheld version is respectable, but never feels as good as the original – movement is less smooth. It's missing the Beat Box table of the original game and obviously takes a good graphical hit, too. It's not among the premier pinball games on Nintendo's green-screened wonder.



GAME GEAR

Year 1994

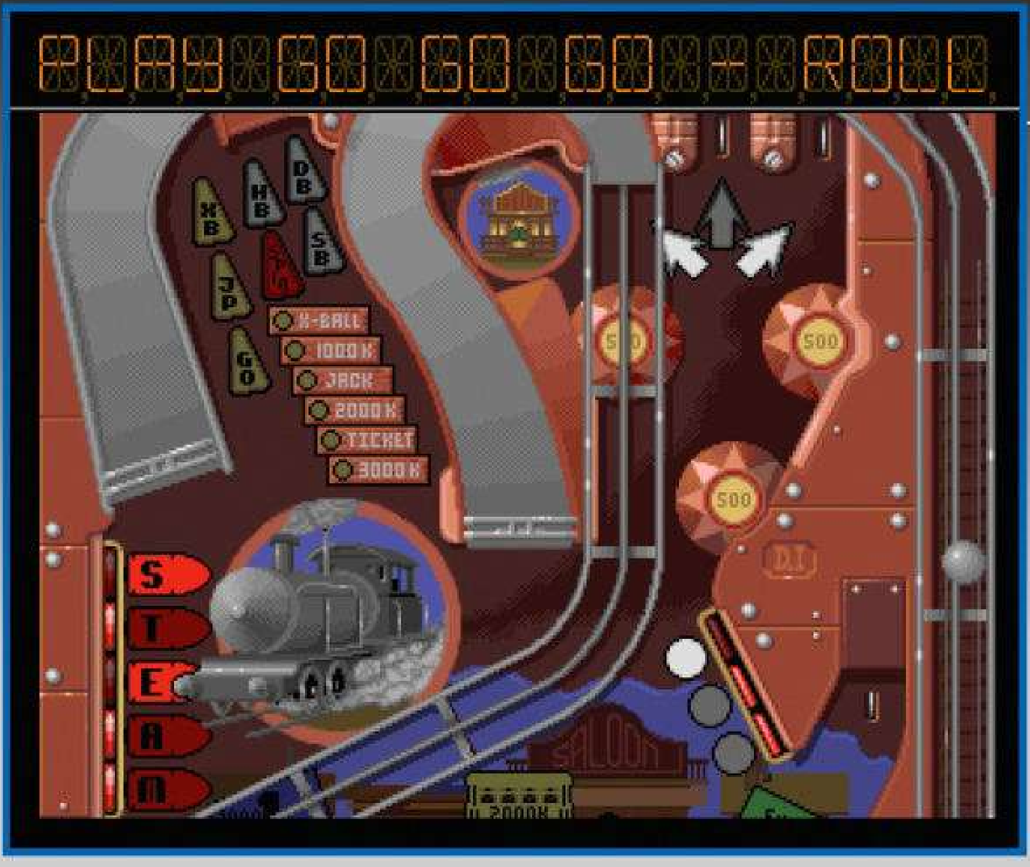
A US-only release, this is much like the Game Boy version of the game. The addition of colour graphics is obviously nice, but the music doesn't come across quite as well. Since your options for pinball games on the Game Gear are pretty limited, this is the pick of the bunch.



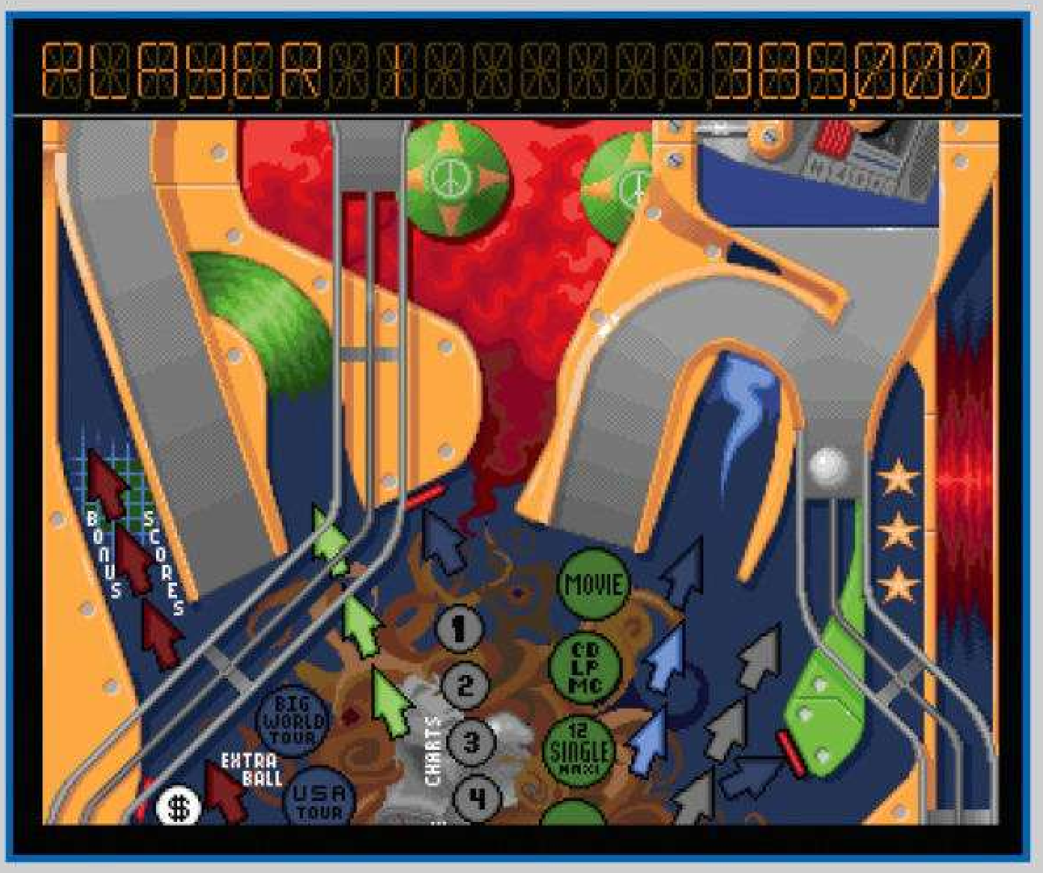
SNES

Year 1994

A really nice conversion, with good graphics, satisfying ball movement and all four tables intact. For some reason, many of the console versions renamed the Nightmare table to Graveyard and that's the case here, with a couple of slight graphical edits needed to comply with Nintendo's content guidelines.



» [Amiga] Working out how to do these ramps was one of the trickier tasks Andreas tackled.



▶ simplicity of Ignition or the more technically challenging Beat Box, and everyone has their favourite. Most importantly, all of them adhere to the limitations of real pinball tables, and mimic the long table layouts too.

P*inball Dreams* could have succeeded simply by playing a decent game of pinball, given the lack of games that were trying to provide such an experience, but what made it so memorable was that every aspect of the game was so highly polished. Markus Nyström brought the table themes to life with art that makes excellent use of the Amiga's graphical capabilities, while ensuring that none of them ended up being so visually busy that the action became hard to discern. Olof Gustaffson's music was brilliant too, and remains one of the key appealing aspects of the game for fans today. What's more, the tables all had sound effects that really captured the feeling of playing a real pinball table. In fact, sound was often one of the more heavily downgraded aspects of the game when *Pinball Dreams* was ported to other formats.

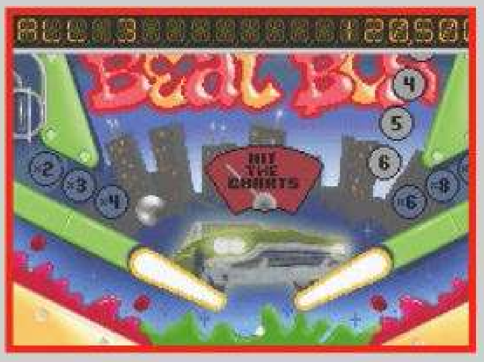
When *Pinball Dreams* launched in March 1992, it received a very warm welcome from the Amiga press. Despite claiming to have "never liked pinball", *The One*'s reviewer Paul Presley gave the game 89%, praising it for "the superb musical scores that play throughout the game to the sheer speed with which everything moves". In *Amiga Power*, Stuart Campbell awarded the game 87%, saying that it was "closer to the real thing than any other attempt I've seen on any machine". *Amiga Action* also gave it 87%, noting the realism of the ball movement and ▶

> "ARCADE MACHINES IN GENERAL WERE VERY RESTRICTED IN SWEDEN, SO IT WAS HARD TO FIND ANY"
> **ANDREAS AXELSSON**

MORE VERSIONS

A faithful Atari Falcon conversion was created by the late Stewart Gilray in 1995, and scored 80% in *ST Format*. The PSP version is a Minis game and compatible with the PS3 and PS Vita – in fact, if you do want to play it on your PSP you'll need to download it via PS3 and transfer it across.

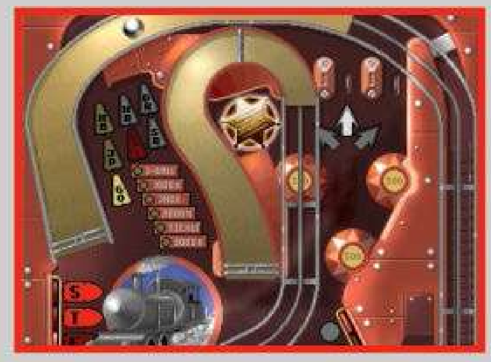
PLENTY OF FORMATS GOT SOME PINBALL LOVE, BUT WAS EVERY VERSION AS DREAMY AS THE ORIGINAL?



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Year **2002**

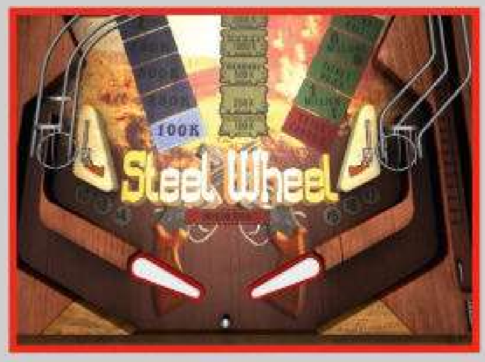
This Europe-only release was titled *Pinball Challenge Deluxe*, and features great graphics and music as well as all of the tables, plus the four *Pinball Fantasies* tables. It sounds ideal, but unfortunately the view of the table is zoomed in way too close and there's no option to change it.



PSP

Year **2009**

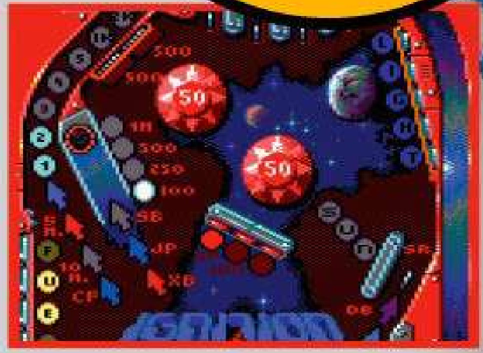
Cowboy Rodeo's digital-only release is a faithful conversion of the Amiga original, with all four tables and the graphics and sound intact. There lots of options here, including the ability to rotate the screen. The PSP digital store has closed, so you'll need an alternative system to buy it today.



IOS

Year **2009**

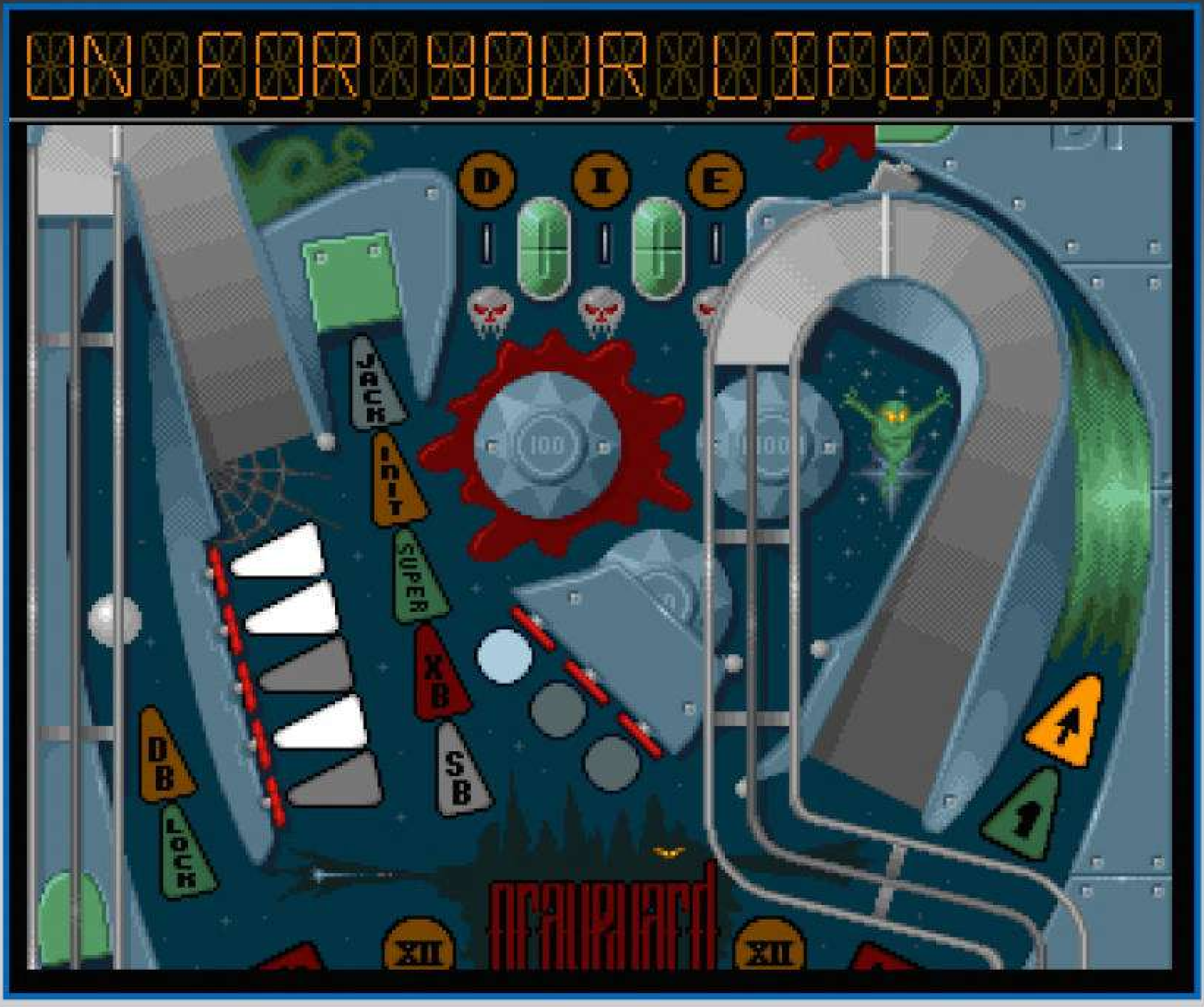
This version by Cowboy Rodeo is titled *Pinball Dreaming: Pinball Dreams*. It's a remake with 3D versions of the four original tables, and like its PSP counterpart features plenty of options. Despite being an older iPhone and iPad release, it was updated until 2016 and is still available to buy today.



AMSTRAD CPC

Year **2019**

This homebrew conversion by Batman Group shows just how capable Lord Sugar's computer really is. All four tables are included, graphical detail is excellent and it plays very well indeed. The only downer is that it requires a 128K machine with a floppy disk drive, so won't run on a standard 464.



» [Amiga] Shooting the loop around the top of Nightmare will trigger bonus features like 'Run For Your Life'.

"fast and extremely smooth" vertical scrolling. Daniel Whitehead voiced a common complaint in his review in *Amiga Computing*, noting that "for nearly £26 you don't get enough variety", though he still liked the game enough to give it 86%. Other scores include 86% from *Zero*, 84% from *Amiga Format* and 83% from *CU Amiga*.

That acclaim was a sign of success to come, as *Pinball Dreams* sold extremely well for Digital Illusions and 21st Century Entertainment. Digital Illusions quickly got to work on the next game in the series, and with *Pinball Fantasies* achieving a similar level of success upon its release in October 1992, *Pinball Illusions* followed for the Amiga 1200 in 1995. However, Digital Illusions wasn't the only team working on the series. Spidersoft produced ports of the first two games to a variety of formats, and was then tasked with producing its own pinball games for 21st Century Entertainment. This partnership resulted in *Pinball Dreams II*, *Pinball Mania* and its update *Total Pinball 3D*, *Pinball Builder* and *Pinball World*.

Digital Illusions moved on from pinball and by the end of the Nineties, it had established itself as a racing game specialist with games like *S40 Racing*, *Motorhead* and the *Swedish Touring Car Championship* series.

The studio reached a turning point in 2002 upon the release of *Battlefield 1942*, a first-person shooter that became a big hit based on its excellent multiplayer gameplay. That success resulted in the studio's gradual acquisition by EA from 2004-2006. Today, the studio is commonly known as DICE and the founding members have moved on. It mostly works on its most famous series, but is also known for the likes of *Mirror's Edge* and *Star Wars Battlefront*.

Though Digital Illusions hasn't been developing pinball games for many years now and 21st Century Entertainment is long defunct, the widespread love for *Pinball Dreams* has endured. That popularity has ensured that it remains relatively easy to buy today, as the original releases can still be purchased on PC via GOG or on older PlayStation consoles. If you prefer a more modern experience, the Finnish developer Cowboy Rodeo released a 3D remake on Apple devices in 2009, which thankfully survived the great 32-bit app purge of iOS 11 and remains available via the App Store.

> "WE DIDN'T ACTUALLY START WORKING ON ANYTHING ELSE UNTIL AFTER THE PHYSICS FELT GOOD"
>
> **ANDREAS AXELSSON**

In an age where players have easy access to dozens of licensed tables via *Pinball FX 3*, the idea of a game with just four tables can seem a bit quaint. But it's worth remembering that even offering four tables was a pretty great deal in the early Nineties – after all, games like the *Pro Pinball* series and *Worms Pinball* gave players just a single table to enjoy well into the late-Nineties. By offering players real value as well as a focus on authentic pinball action that couldn't be found elsewhere, Digital Illusions really earned its success with *Pinball Dreams*. We'd suggest you put it on and have a quick bash on Nightmare too, because even after 30 years, it still plays like a dream. *

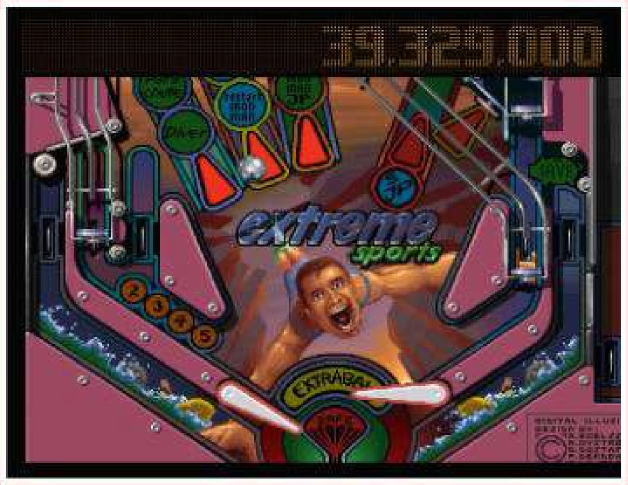
BEYOND YOUR DREAMS

THE PINBALL DELIGHTS THAT DIGITAL ILLUSIONS WENT ON TO OFFER

PINBALL FANTASIES

Year 1992

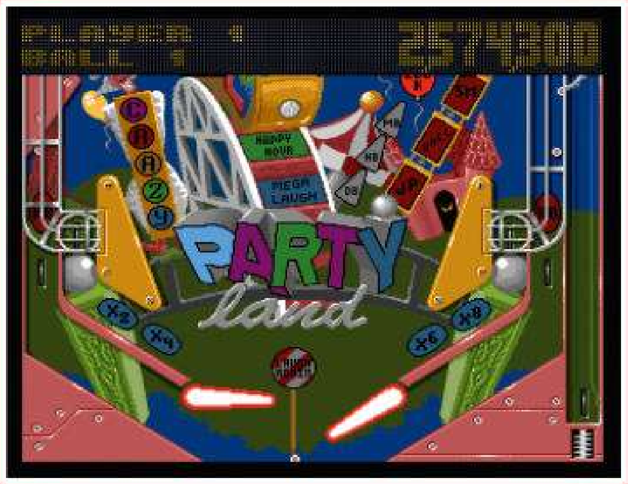
This sequel took only months to develop, and is substantially similar to *Pinball Dreams* but features four new tables – Party Land, Speed Devils, Billion Dollar Game Show and Stones 'N Bones. Much like the first game, it was very popular and widely ported to other consoles and computers.



PINBALL ILLUSIONS

Year 1995

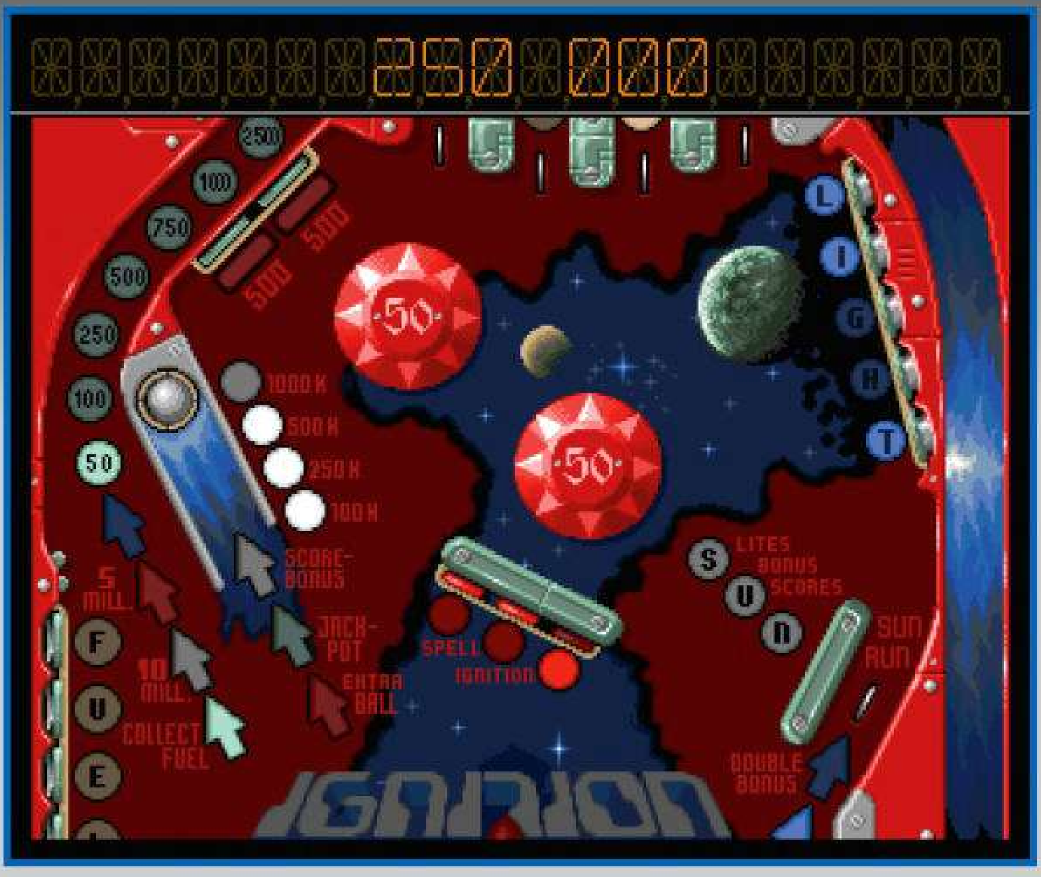
The third game in the series was designed for the Amiga 1200 and consisted of three tables: Law 'N Justice, Extreme Sports and Babewatch. This swan song for the series on the Amiga featured multiball functions for the first time. The PC version gained an extra table, Vikings.



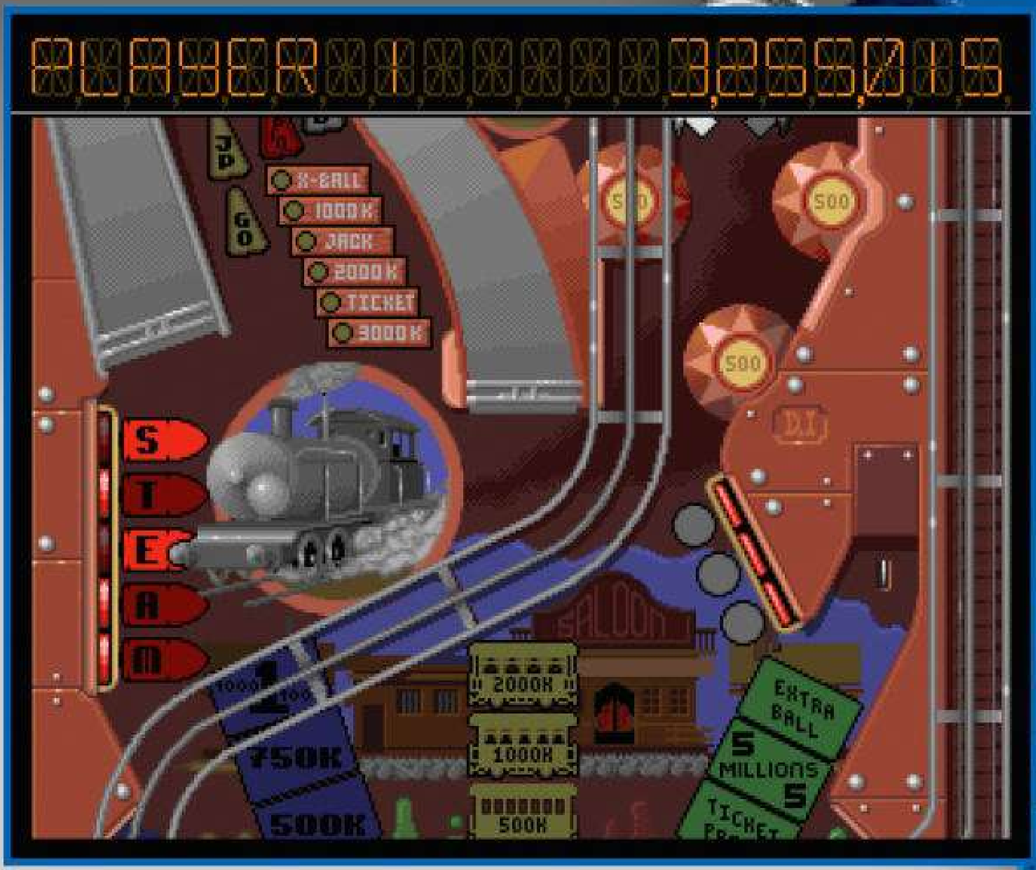
TRUE PINBALL

Year 1996

Ocean published this version of *Pinball Illusions* for the PlayStation and Saturn. It contains 3D rendered versions of all four of the game's tables, with a tilted perspective allowing you to see more of the table at any time, but unfortunately lacks the brilliant intro music from the Amiga version.



» [Amiga] We've successfully hit the hole here to earn a nice big 250,000 point bonus.



» [Amiga] The middle of the Steel Wheel table has a good number of targets for you to aim at.

ANDREAS AXELSSON Q&A

THE DIGITAL ILLUSIONS COFOUNDER AND PROGRAMMER OF PINBALL DREAMS LOOKS BACK AT HIS EARLY HIT

Why did the team decide to create a pinball game?
We wanted to move on from just making demos, and a game seemed like the only reasonable next step. We all loved pinball games, and it seemed rather easy to do, just get the ball moving right, add some sound and graphics! In addition the few pinball games that were available at the time were lacking the feel of real machines, and had all been modified to fit the screen, if you like.

Were there any pinball tables that were popular with the team when making the game?
I think we played everything we came across. At the time arcade machines in general were very restricted in Sweden, so it was hard to find any. I don't even remember which ones I had access to, to be honest – only that I had to walk down to the basement behind the tobacco shop in the alley to find them. The first time I had really good access to real games was when we went to Seattle and Los Angeles after releasing *Pinball Dreams*. There I played *The Addams Family* and *Terminator 2* any chance I had. Two amazing games. Olof had much better access as he knew people working with distribution and service of pinball games, but we didn't live in the same town, so it was mostly to his benefit.

Were there any aspects of *Pinball Dreams* that were difficult to implement from a programming perspective?
There were all sorts of things we had to figure out. The ball physics was the main thing. From the start we said that if we can't get that right there's no point in making the rest of the game. So we didn't actually start working on anything else until after the physics felt good on a black and white mini section of a table. It looked like a bowl with a flipper and a couple of round bits in the middle, and one could get a feel for it without sound, score, or art. Using the half-bright mode for lights seemed quite obvious, but it took a while to come up with a model for doing ramps and multiple layers that didn't use too much memory. I recall the copy protection was a bit too good, the disk duplication equipment couldn't make copies, so I had to simplify it a bit.

***Pinball Dreams* was the start of a successful series – did it feel like a special game while you were making it?**
We had a lot of fun while we were making the game, so it always felt like we had a good thing going, but there was one specific moment when we knew we had something big. Fredrik shared an apartment with a friend at the university, and he was going away over the weekend. He asked the friend to try the game, but the friend declined as he had an exam coming up. Nevertheless, when Fredrik came back a few days later he found the friend in front of the computer with dark eyes, pizza boxes on the floor, and not a single minute spent on studying for the exam. He looked up and said, "I hate you," then kept playing.

Which table did you find to be your favourite?
I had a fierce competition for first place with the producer Barry Simpson on Ignition, so in a way I keep coming back to that table the most.

Did the team end up with a pinball wizard who dominated the high score tables, or did you all find yourselves closely matched?
People played to a varying degree, but Olof was the de facto pinball master when it came to real tables, so he just had a knack for racking up points that were hard to beat, regardless of the table. I did get over a billion points on Beat Box at one point though. I recall that caused some stir. I think I played the most hours of all of us, since everything I was doing basically meant I was playing and testing the game every day for years.

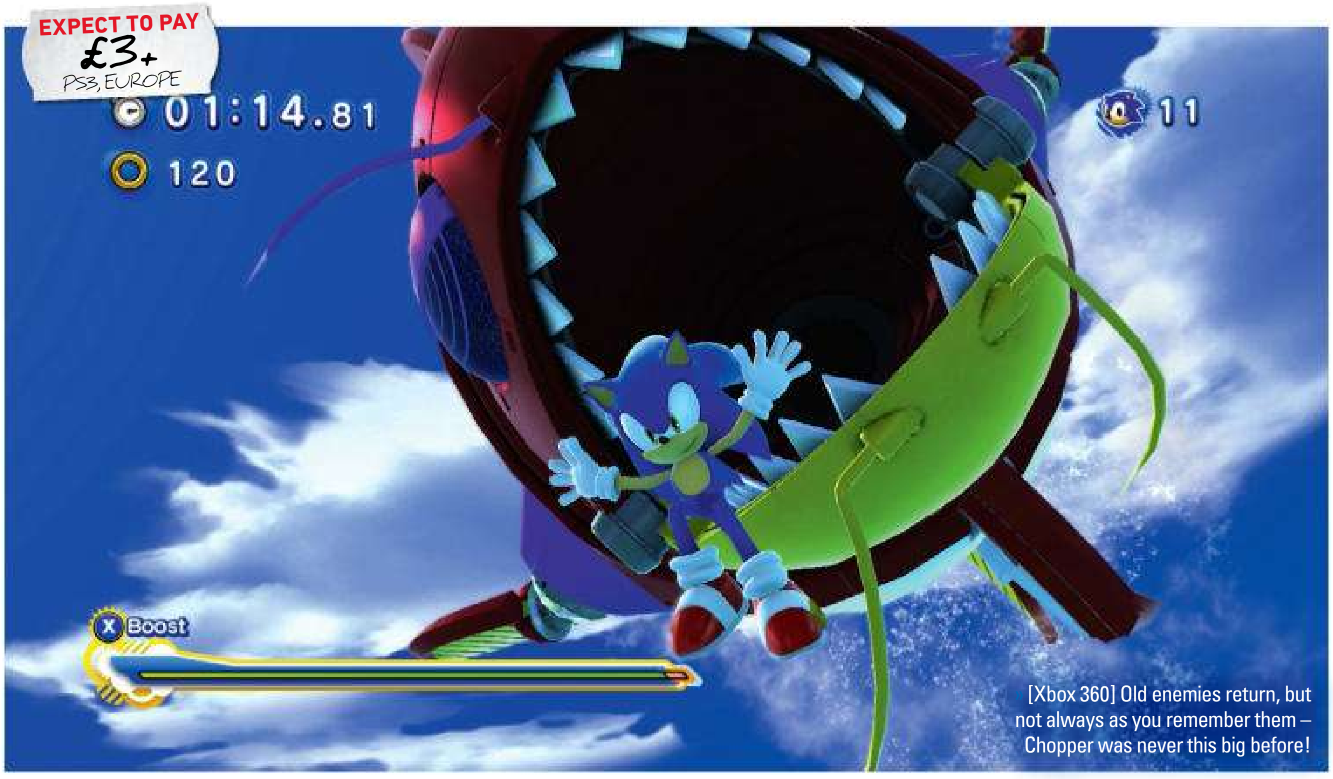
SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

SONIC GAMES

Sega's mascot has starred in plenty of games, from quality outings to questionable releases – and as always, the price doesn't always match the pleasure. Here are some of the most interesting items in the speedy little chap's repertoire

Words by Nick Thorpe

EXPECT TO PAY
£3+
PS3, EUROPE



[Xbox 360] Old enemies return, but not always as you remember them – Chopper was never this big before!

CHEAP THRILLS

SONIC GENERATIONS

XBOX 360
SONIC GENERATIONS
SEGA

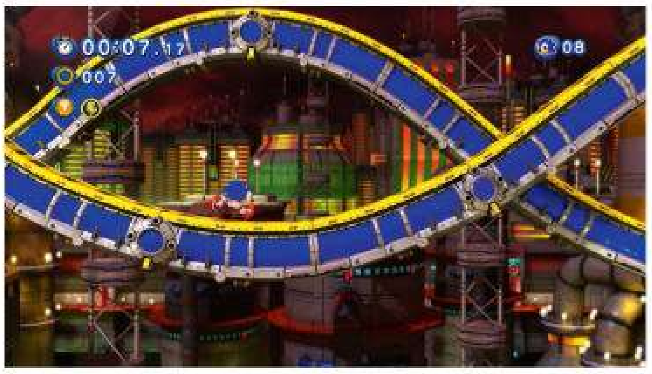
EXPECT TO PAY
£8+
PC

DEVELOPER:	SONIC TEAM
RELEASE:	2011

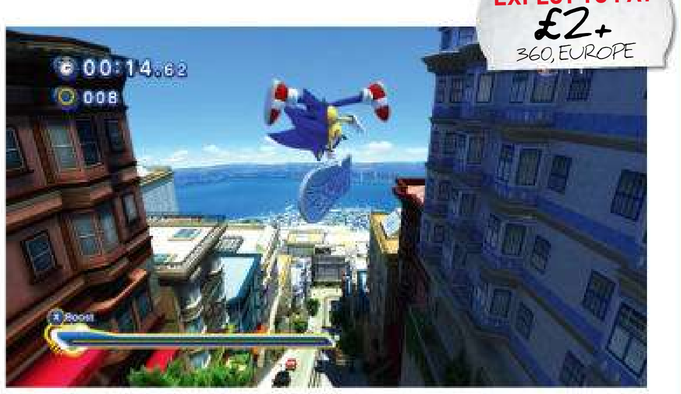
■ When Sonic had to team up with another hero for a time-travel anniversary adventure, there was only one choice – the shorter and considerably quieter Sonic of the Mega Drive era. Together they visit classic stages from across the series including Green Hill Zone, Speed Highway and Crisis City, each spectacularly remade with brand-new 2.5D and 3D designs. It's an absolute treat for fans of the series, and arguably the best *Sonic* game since the Dreamcast era. *Sonic Generations* sold well and isn't too expensive on any platform.

The Xbox 360 version was reissued in a dual-branded Xbox 360/Xbox One variant, and gains big improvements on modern hardware – Xbox One X gives it a resolution boost, and Xbox Series X adds 60fps gameplay to that, making it the console version of choice. Big fans may wish to seek out the collector's edition box set, which includes a figure, documentary DVD, soundtrack CD, art book and gold ring, and goes for £120 and up on Xbox 360 and PS3.

EXPECT TO PAY
£2+
360, EUROPE



» [Xbox 360] Stages like Chemical Plant Zone look pretty amazing given a lick of modern 3D paint.

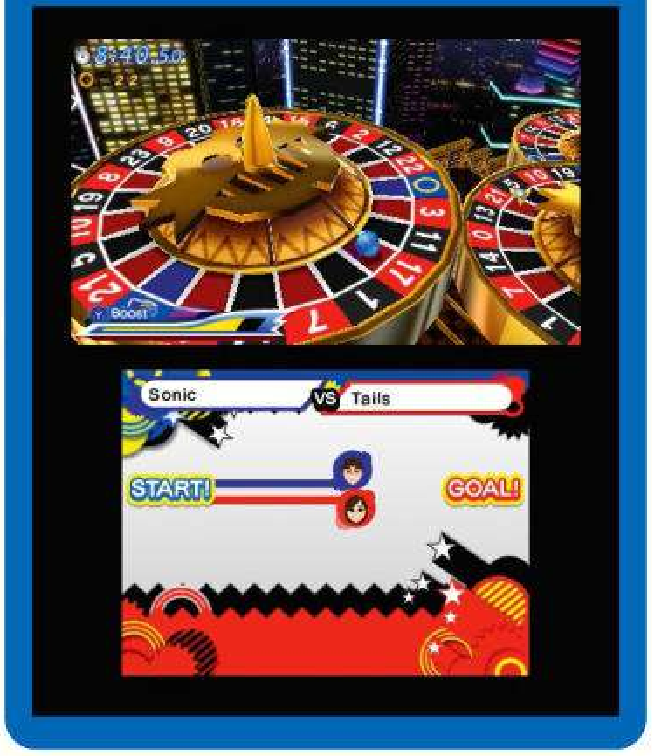


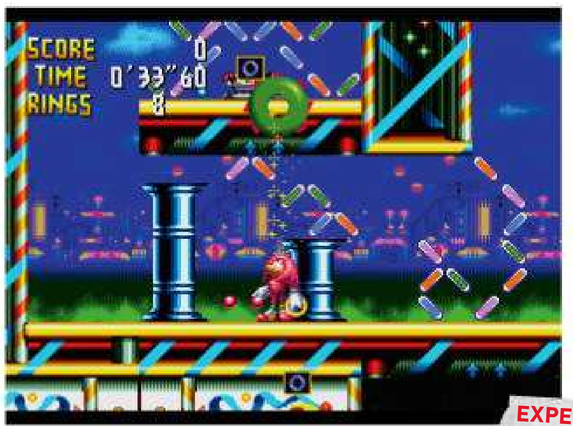
» [Xbox 360] The new stage designs incorporate fan favourite moments like City Escape's boarding.

GENERATIONS APART

For when you need nostalgia on the go

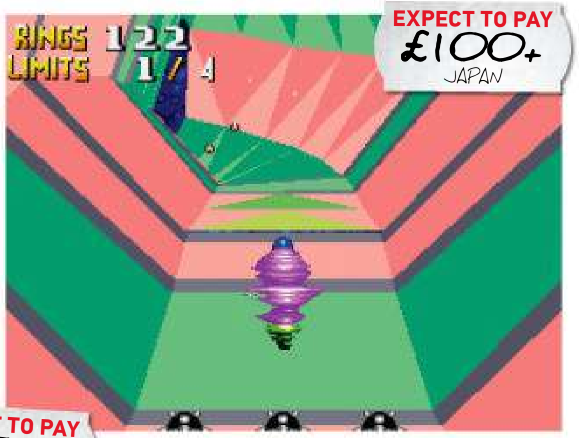
■ *Sonic Generations* was also released for the 3DS, and it's a completely different game to its home console counterpart. Both classic and modern Sonic explore 2.5D stages this time, and a largely different selection of stages and bosses are represented, including Casino Night Zone, Emerald Coast and even Water Palace from *Sonic Rush*. That last inclusion is down to the fact that this game was developed by Dimps, the team behind the *Sonic Advance* and *Sonic Rush* series on the GBA and DS, and it's similar in quality to those games. While the handheld version of *Sonic Generations* isn't quite as cheap as the others, it's still priced low – you can pick up a complete copy from as little as £6. Since the 3DS is region locked, you may also wish to know that Japanese copies are similarly priced, while a US copy is a little more at about £11+ complete.





» [32X] Knuckles throws Vector, in a desperate bid to rid himself of the annoying crocodile.

EXPECT TO PAY
£350+
EUROPE



EXPECT TO PAY
£100+
JAPAN

» [32X] Polygonal bonus stages mark a rare display of the 32X's power within *Chaotix*.

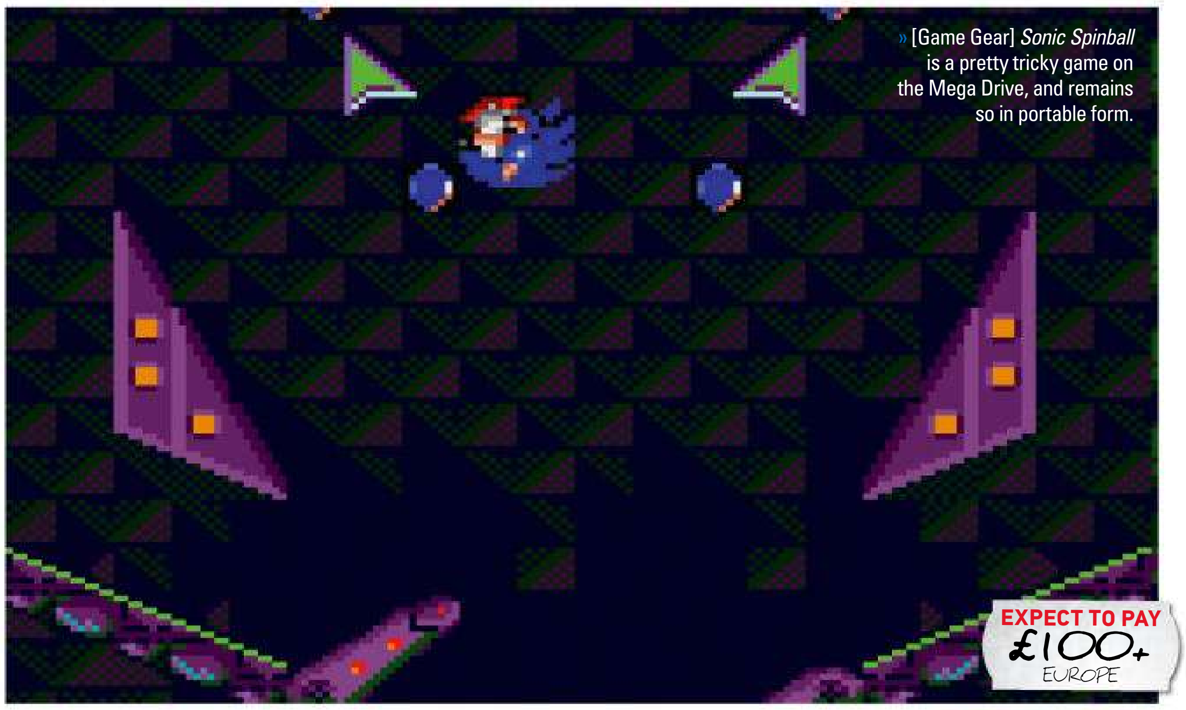
32XPENSIVE

KNUCKLES' CHAOTIX

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1995

EXPECT TO PAY
£120+
USA

■ When Sega sent the 32X into the world, it didn't send the big guns – nope, Sonic stayed at home and Knuckles was teamed up with a bunch of misfit heroes including the forgotten sidekick Mighty and the concept-art relic Vector. We feel that says a lot about Sega's confidence in the 32X, as well as the oddball gameplay twist that had pairs of characters attached by bungee cord. Even without that, the levels aren't the strongest in the series. However, demand is high as this game has never been ported to any other platform, and supply is low because it was a 32X exclusive. While NTSC copies will work on NTSC hardware regardless of region, PAL copies won't run on NTSC systems and vice versa. All regions got cardboard boxes, so you can potentially strike a deal if you don't mind owning a tatty copy.



» [Game Gear] *Sonic Spinball* is a pretty tricky game on the Mega Drive, and remains so in portable form.

EXPECT TO PAY
£100+
EUROPE

CASH COMPILATION

SONIC 2-IN-1

DEVELOPER:	ASPECT/SEGA
RELEASE:	1995

■ This one's a strange one, as it's the form rather than the function determining the price tag here. It's a compilation of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *Sonic Spinball* for the Game Gear, and it's so incredibly simple that there's no menu – the system simply boots up one of the games each time, and the other the next time. Loose carts are going for £30+ alone, as it's a late release released in limited quantities, and only in Europe. Finding a complete copy is very hard, so while we've provided a baseline, you should expect values to be volatile when one does eventually surface as people try to complete their *Sonic* or Game Gear collections. Since neither game is hard to obtain elsewhere, this one is really strictly for the collectors these days.

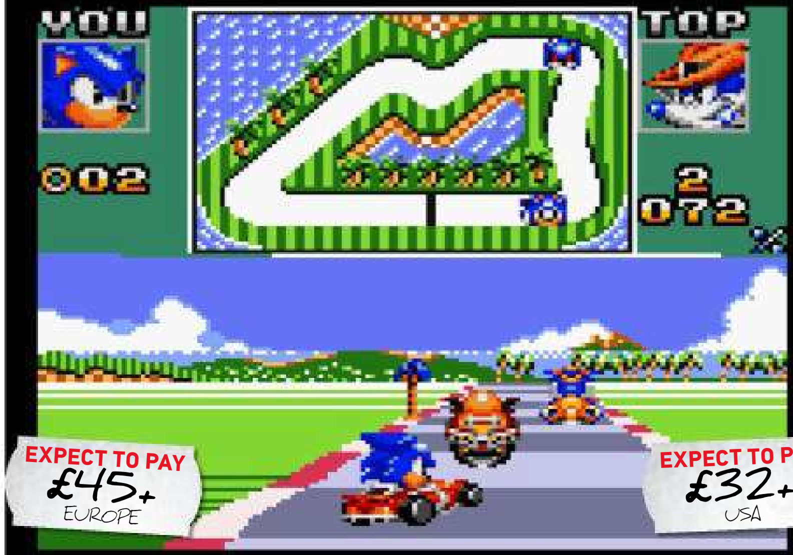
DRIFT KING

SONIC DRIFT RACING

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1995

EXPECT TO PAY
£12+
JAPAN

■ This is actually the second *Sonic Drift* game, and in other regions it goes by the title *Sonic Drift 2*. The original *Sonic Drift* never left Japan, but to be honest that's for the better as this one is miles better. Three new racers have joined the roster for a total of seven, there are new items to pick up, and the game has eighteen tracks – three times as many as the first game. They're pretty ambitious too, with features like bridges, tunnels, banked curves and gaps that you rarely see in 8-bit racers. The AI improvements also mean that you'll really need to fight for first place. Pricing is all over the place for European copies but other regions seem a bit more stable, and as always, loose cartridges are much cheaper.

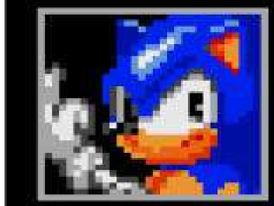


EXPECT TO PAY
£45+
EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY
£32+
USA

STARTING GRID

Our favourite racers and their special abilities



Sonic
Our hero is nice and fast, but his handling isn't great. His unique special ability is a speed dash.

Tails
Sonic's pal drives a vehicle with decent all-round capabilities. Jumping is his personal special move.

Knuckles
The guardian of Angel Island can also jump, but if he's close enough to a rival he'll punch them instead.

Amy
Amy's quick off the mark but has a low top speed. She throws hearts which slow down other racers.

Eggman
Nobody corners better than the good Doctor Robotnik. He can drop mines to damage his opponents too.

Metal Sonic
Sonic's robotic foe is all speed, no handling. His super-speed dash costs three rings instead of two.

COLLECTING TIPS!

Think Global

■ Whenever you're collecting a series across multiple platforms, it's smart to pay extra attention to each system's region locking status ahead of buying anything.

Variant Of Concern

■ Cover variants aren't usually a huge factor, but can affect price – we saw a couple of copies of *Sonic Lost World* go a little cheap because of their German covers.

Look Around

■ *Sonic* games are popular enough that you'll find them in the wild, so it's always best to scout the market before resorting to a Buy It Now listing on eBay.

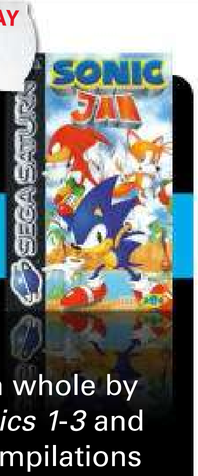
Life Choices

■ Do you really *need* that copy of *Sonic 06*? Who's going to give you a medal for having *Sonic Boom: Rise Of Lyric* on your shelf? These are good questions to ask. [Nick has them - Ed]

PUMP UP THE...

SONIC JAM

EXPECT TO PAY £95+ USA



DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASE: 1997

■ It's crazy to think that this compilation of Mega Drive games was the only Saturn *Sonic* release developed in whole by Sonic Team. The collection comprises *Sonics 1-3* and *Sonic & Knuckles*, and while later *Sonic* compilations have surpassed the quantity of games here, few videogame compilations of any kind can match it for the care and attention shown. The games are natively ported to the Saturn and, bar some quirks arising from the use of CD audio, run exactly as you'd expect. However, what really makes the compilation so good is its plentiful extras, which improve the play experience and provide historical context. As usual with Saturn games, Japanese and European prices are reasonable but American prices are very high.

» [Saturn] You can't normally do the spin dash in *Sonic 1*. All hail *Sonic Jam*!

» [Saturn] It looks like the Saturn could have hosted a very decent 3D platformer, given a team that understood it.

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £22+ JAPAN

JAM-PACKED!

The bonuses that are worth seeking Sonic Jam for

GAME TWEAKS

Revised versions of every game are available in *Sonic Jam* – as well as the Original mode, normal and easy options have been created with fewer hazards and sometimes even fewer stages. The first game also includes the extra graphical effects of the revised Mega Drive version, and the spin dash move from *Sonic 2* can be enabled.

SONIC WORLD

This graphically impressive playground is the closest thing we got to a proper 3D *Sonic* game on the Saturn. The missions you undertake are actually very simple – collect rings, find secrets, pop balloons – but they're fun to mess around with, and give a tantalising glimpse at what could have been achieved with Sega's 32-bit machine.

MUSEUM EXHIBITS

Games are represented with authentic 3D cartridges, and digital versions of the original manuals are included. The various buildings in *Sonic World* grant access to all sorts of goodies – a timeline of Sonic's history, various clips of adverts and cutscenes from past games, a wealth of character art and of course a sound test.

BOARD SILLY

SONIC SHUFFLE

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £90+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ USA

DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT/SONIC TEAM
RELEASE: 2000

■ When we think of *Sonic Shuffle*, an imaginary scenario plays out in our heads. "There's a *Mario Party*, and we're not invited," says a dejected chap at Sonic Team. "Why don't we do that, but with Sonic? It'll be great," a colleague responds. "We'll get Hudson Soft involved, and it'll even have that cel-shading all the kids loved in *Jet Set Radio*! What could go wrong?" Back here in reality, plenty did go wrong – even if you eliminated the party-pooping AI, the obnoxious loading times between confusing minigames could easily ruin the fun. It's a shame, because it does look nice. There's a big regional discrepancy here as the Japanese game is cheap as heck, American copies are reasonable, and PAL copies are more than we'd consider for a game of such dubious merits.

» [Dreamcast] Running around *Sonic Shuffle*'s boards can be pretty tedious, especially against the CPU.

» [Dreamcast] Some minigames are OK – this one where you have to survive a tilting maze is rather decent.

UNCONTESTED

SONIC ADVENTURE 2: BATTLE

EXPECT TO PAY £22+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASE: 2001

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ EUROPE

■ This wasn't Sonic's first appearance on a Nintendo console – that honour went to *Sonic Advance* – but this GameCube release was a formative experience for many new fans, and younger fans in particular regard it as a favourite in the series. It's an enhanced version of the Dreamcast original (£45+ in Europe), and tasks you with controlling both Sonic's crew and Robotnik's new mates Shadow and Rouge in a battle for the fate of the planet, across platform, shooting and treasure hunting stages. As well as general gameplay tweaks, this version justifies its subtitle with expanded two-player and Chao Garden modes. While the GameCube can be expensive to collect for, this game was so popular that it's now dirt cheap by the standards of the platform in Europe and Japan. US copies are a little higher in price as there's a bit more demand there.

» [GameCube] Blowing stuff up with Robotnik's laser tank thing feels pretty cool because evil is fun.

MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1991
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£5+** , USA **£7.50+** , JAPAN **£7.50+**

SONIC CD

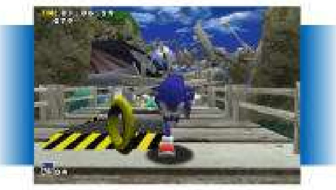
DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1993
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£45+**, USA **£32+**, JAPAN **£12+**

SONIC TRIPLE TROUBLE

DEVELOPER: ASPECT
RELEASED: 1994
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£80+** , USA **£40+** , JAPAN **£10+**

SONIC R

DEVELOPER: TRAVELLER'S TALES
RELEASED: 1997
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£20+** , USA **£75+** , JAPAN **£6+**



SONIC ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASED: 1998
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£5+** , USA **£15+** , JAPAN **£2+**

THIRD TIME LUCKY

SONIC 3

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £22+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ USA

DEVELOPER: SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
RELEASE: 1994

» [Mega Drive] Everyone loves Ice Cap Zone, even if it can give you some hard times.

■ Sonic's third adventure may be essentially only half of what it's supposed to be, with the other half being *Sonic & Knuckles*, but it's still a very high-quality outing for Sega's mascot and his yet-to-be-playable rival. It sold well, but it isn't as common as the first two games in the series and hasn't been reissued since 2010, so demand has pushed the price up a bit. It's also the only one of Sonic's major Mega Drive outings to be region locked, though you can get around that by locking on to *Sonic & Knuckles*. The US version comes in two forms – the original 1994 release in the usual plastic case, and a 1997 *Mega Hit Series* version in a cardboard box. Both of them seem to fetch similar prices, although the cardboard version will naturally be more prone to wear and tear.

LOST TO TIME?

SONIC LOST WORLD

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £13+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £14+ USA

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASE: 2013

» [Wii U] Takashi Iizuka has claimed *Jack And The Beanstalk* was more of an influence than *Super Mario Galaxy*.

■ After experiencing success with *Sonic Colours* and *Sonic Generations*, Sonic Team decided to take a different approach for the spiky mascot's next appearance. The cylindrical stages reminded many of *Super Mario Galaxy*'s awesome globes, but this experiment was too uneven to match those glorious heights. This game formed part of an exclusivity deal between Sega and Nintendo, so the Wii U has the only home console version of the game – it did also appear on PC, and there is a 3DS game of the same name with different stage designs. The Wii U was infamously unpopular to begin with and Nintendo platforms often attract a price premium amongst collectors, so this could be one to watch in the future as the platform transitions from being merely old to being regarded as retro.

KART ATTACK

SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ EUROPE VITA

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ EUROPE PC

DEVELOPER: SUMO DIGITAL
RELEASE: 2013

■ Sonic has done his share of bandwagon jumping in the past, but you'd be a fool to overlook this amazing racing game. Rather than racing exclusively on the road, Sonic and guests from games such as *Jet Set Radio* and *Shinobi* have vehicles that can transform into planes and boats. Sumo Digital put together some fantastic tracks that change from lap to lap, and any Sega maniac will be delighted with the fan service on offer here. There are a multitude of versions available but they all strive to provide the same game experience, with necessary concessions on handhelds. Xbox Series X owners will benefit from an improved framerate on the 360 version, but the PC version also rocks 60fps and has extra DLC characters to buy.

» [PS3] Everybody's favourite character Shadow jets around the *After Burner* aircraft-carrier stage.

THREE'S COMPANY

Here are Sumo Digital's other Sonic racing games

SONIC & SEGA ALL-STARS RACING

This first outing in the series was released on Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, DS and PC in 2010. It keeps Sonic and his Sega chums strictly on the road, with the main gimmick being that each character has a unique 'All-Star Move' for times of desperate need. Beyond that it's just a very good take on *Mario Kart*, with some nice driving missions to keep you busy.

TEAM SONIC RACING

This arrived in 2019 on the PS4, Xbox One, Switch and PC, and ditches the Sega characters and transforming vehicles. Instead you get an unusual co-op twist on kart racing, which lets you boost and donate items to your friends. It's great for less adversarial types but recycles plenty of tracks from past games, and it's not quite as much fun as *Transformed*.

SONIC MEGA COLLECTION

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASED: 2002
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£7+** , USA **£4.50+** , JAPAN **£7.50+**

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

DEVELOPER: SEGA SPORTS R&D
RELEASED: 2007
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£2.50+** , USA **£1.50+** , JAPAN **£1+**

SONIC RIVALS

DEVELOPER: BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT
RELEASED: 2006
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£3+** , USA **£5+**

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

DEVELOPER: BIOWARE
RELEASED: 2008
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£4+** , USA **£18+** , JAPAN **£20+**

SONIC COLOURS

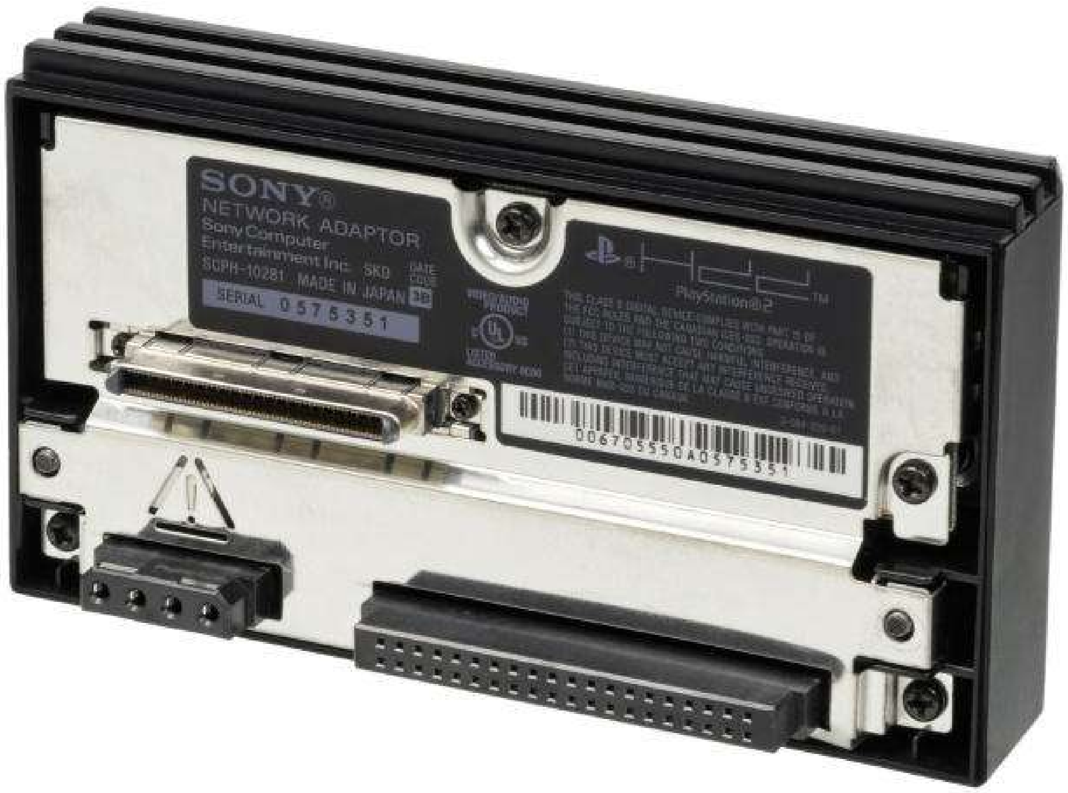
DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
RELEASED: 2010
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE **£4+** , USA **£5+** , JAPAN **£3.50+**

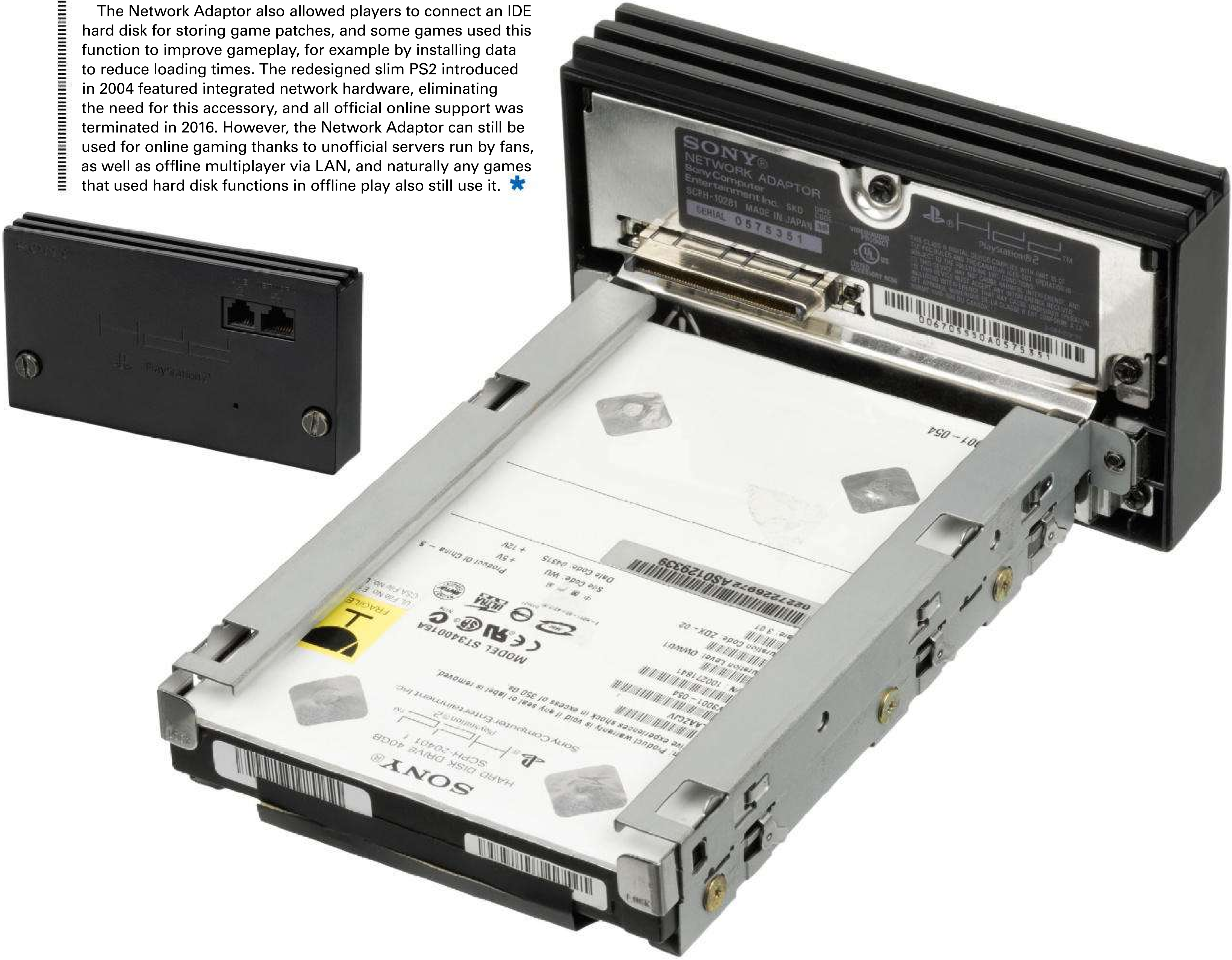
Network Adaptor

» PLATFORM: PlayStation 2 **» RELEASED:** 2001
» COST: £24.99 (launch), £20+ (today, boxed) £10+ (today, unboxed)

Where Microsoft was enthusiastic about online gaming with the Xbox and Nintendo was basically uninterested with the GameCube, Sony's online plans for the PS2 were somewhere in between. The company did throw development resources at online games, but stopped short of including network hardware in the console. Instead, players were required to purchase an additional accessory, which connected to the expansion bay on the rear of the console. As well as enabling online gaming, this device was used to facilitate local network play, which had previously been provided by the iLink port that was present on early PS2 models.

The Network Adaptor also allowed players to connect an IDE hard disk for storing game patches, and some games used this function to improve gameplay, for example by installing data to reduce loading times. The redesigned slim PS2 introduced in 2004 featured integrated network hardware, eliminating the need for this accessory, and all official online support was terminated in 2016. However, the Network Adaptor can still be used for online gaming thanks to unofficial servers run by fans, as well as offline multiplayer via LAN, and naturally any games that used hard disk functions in offline play also still use it. *


SONY
NETWORK ADAPTOR
Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.
SCPH-10281 MADE IN JAPAN
SERIAL 0575351
PlayStation®2


PlayStation®2

SONY
NETWORK ADAPTOR
SCPH-10281 MADE IN JAPAN
SONY
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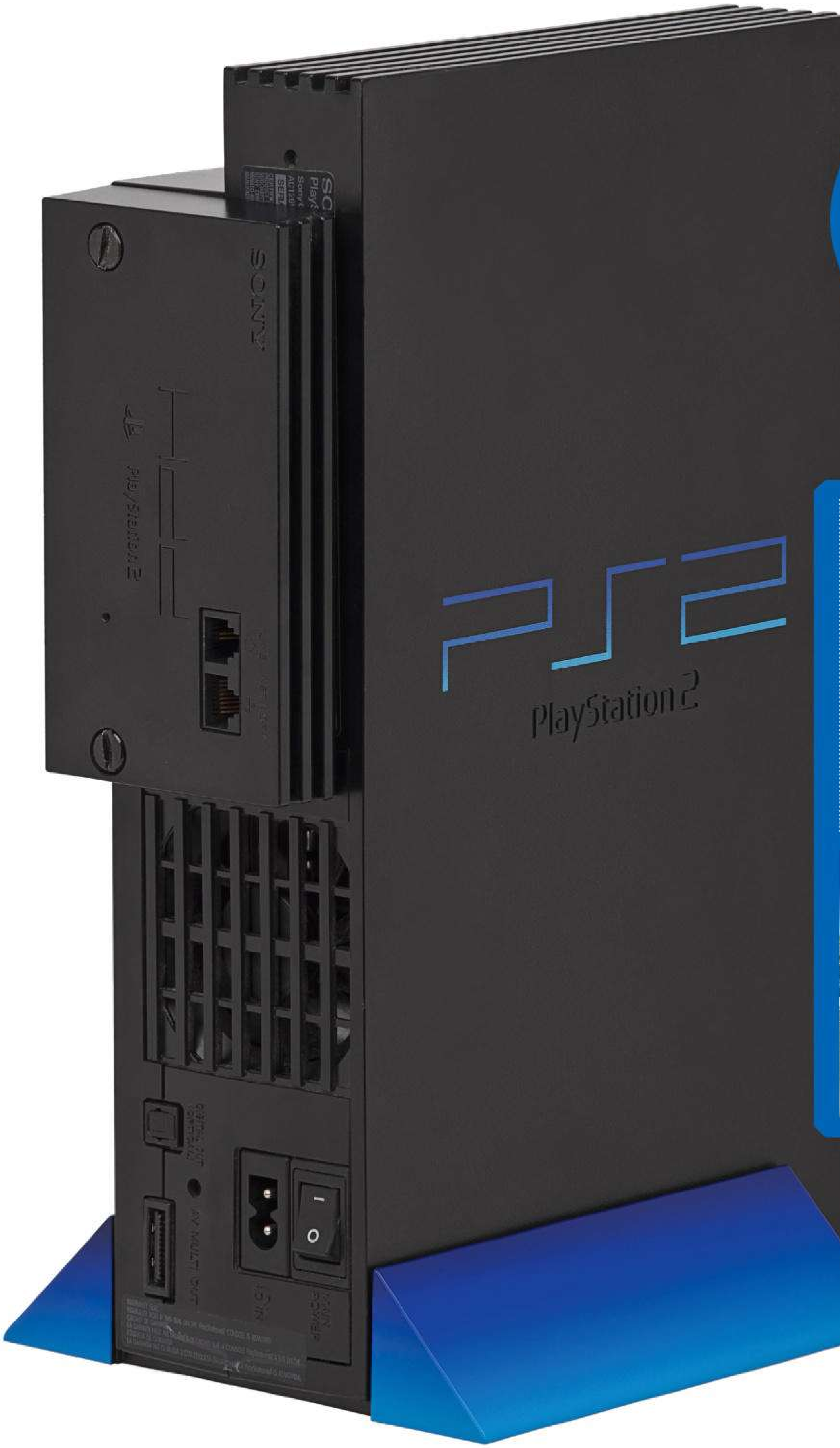
SCPH-20401
PlayStation®2
MODEL ST340015A
FRAGILE



Network Adaptor fact

- North American models of the Network Adaptor features ports for both dial-up and broadband internet connections, whereas international models only support broadband via Ethernet.

ESSENTIAL GAME

OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST

Despite being one of the best arcade racers of all time, *OutRun 2006* does have a couple of flaws and one of them is the lack of a split-screen mode. While you can't play it online these days, you can still enjoy a multiplayer race as *OutRun 2006* supports LAN play for up to six players. The experience is a bit hardware intensive, as each player will need a PS2, a copy of the game, the necessary networking hardware and of course a TV. Is it worth getting the kit together? Well, it's certainly cheaper than linking multiple arcade cabinets.

Total Time
0'41"710
Time
58
Score
0041942
PASS!!
231

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ALIEN
PlayStation

IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: FOX INTERACTIVE

» DEVELOPER: ARGONAUT SOFTWARE

» RELEASED: 2000

» PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION

» GENRE: SURVIVAL HORROR

CROC
PRESS START

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

STARGLIDER II
SYSTEM: ATARI ST, AMIGA, PC, MACINTOSH
YEAR: 1988

STAR FOX
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1993

CROC: LEGEND OF THE GOBBOS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1997

THE MAKING OF

ALIEN RESURRECTION

The sci-fi movie Alien Resurrection was released in 1997. The videogame for Sony's PlayStation, published by Fox Interactive and developed by Argonaut Software in the UK, started development in 1996 but was not published until 2000. What happened?

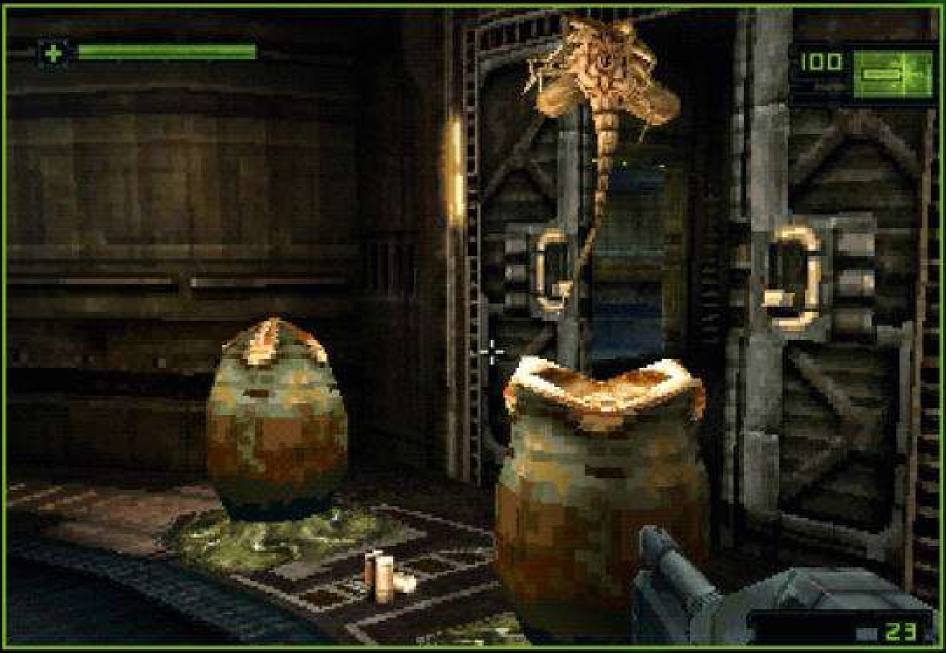
Words by Richard Hewison

The fourth movie in the *Alien* sci-fi horror series appeared in cinemas five and a half years after the melancholic *Alien 3*, and by the late-Nineties, several Hollywood film studios were having a go at videogame publishing, rather than licensing their IP to others. 20th Century Fox set up Fox Interactive in 1994, founded by former Time Warner Interactive executive Ted Hoff. Over the next nine years, Fox published nearly 50 titles including original games as well as TV and film properties based on *Die Hard*, *The X-Files* and *Alien Resurrection*.

» Jez San founded Argonaut Software in the Eighties and received an OBE in 2002.

Working at Fox Interactive in Los Angeles in the mid-Nineties was experienced games producer Gary Sheinwald, who was a close friend of Jez San, founder of Argonaut Software in the UK. Started in the early Eighties from his bedroom, Jez had developed Argonaut into a multimillion-pound plc by the late-Nineties, creating globally successful games like two *Starglider* titles, flight simulator *Birds Of Prey* and helping Nintendo to develop the Super FX GPU for the SNES console, as well as the phenomenally successful *Star Fox* game that first used it.

When the idea of a game based on *Alien Resurrection* was first proposed at Fox, Gary knew who to recommend. Argonaut already had a working relationship with Fox, thanks to its multi-platform 3D title *Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos*. Most of the development team that had recently completed the unrelated game *Alien Odyssey* for Philips Media Inc were moved onto the official *Alien Resurrection* game. At that early stage the team had little information on the plot, and so Argonaut used the time to develop a game engine, employing a top-down 3D view, similar to the recent PlayStation release *Loaded*. As it happens, that approach fitted in with early versions of the screenplay, as Gary recalls. “The game was initially developed as a top-down parallax scroller because the original movie idea was for the main spacecraft to be like a tower block in space, on many levels.”



» [PlayStation] Everyone knows that standing close to an alien egg as it opens is a really bad idea.

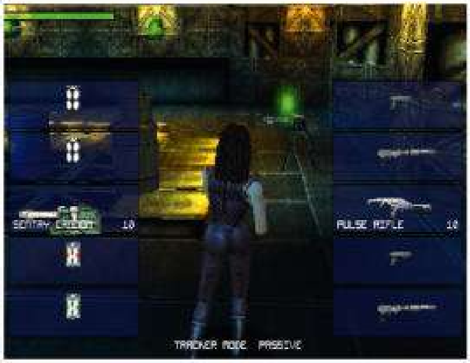
> “The game was initially developed as a top-down parallax scroller…”
> Gary Sheinwald

Work began on the game levels as a research and development exercise, and a robust top-down system complete with a level editor was in place early on. Argonaut also got to work on a game that was to briefly appear in the film, and that work initially took precedence over the licensed game that was to follow. By early 1997, film production was well underway in Hollywood, making it the first *Alien* movie in the series not to be made in England.

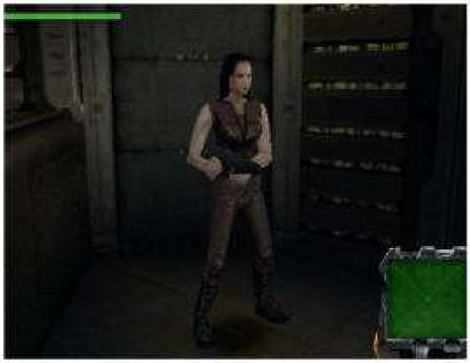
Back in the UK, armed with a huge collection of reference material including 35mm stills, the top-secret screenplay, production art, and even some rough VHS footage, Argonaut could shape its game more accurately to fit the movie. However, mirroring the stylistic changes being made by the director Jean-Pierre Jeunet to the film’s tone, a major change in approach was also requested for Argonaut’s game.

“When *Tomb Raider* became a huge hit, the *Alien Resurrection* game was changed to a third-person action adventure,” Gary explains pragmatically. That was all well and good, but the mixed messages were not helping Argonaut get a clear vision for what the publisher wanted, as Jez elaborates. “What they originally asked us to do, we did, and then we all decided to throw it away and start again from scratch. Originally it was a top-down *Gauntlet* meets *Alien Breed* game, but then we went for the third-person shooter.”

The team was not starting entirely from scratch though. The 3D engine developed for Argonaut’s completed *Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos* platform game was used as the launching point. Building a rudimentary representation of Sigourney Weaver as Ripley 8, the main figure went through various iterations as development progressed, until Argonaut had a main character that was satisfactory. The team then had to design representations of other main characters from the movie, including Christie, Distephano and Call, for specific levels. The game continued evolving, with changes to the inventory system, level designs and graphics happening on a regular basis.



» [PlayStation] This early build shows the inventory system in use. Ripley 8 is certainly well-armed.


» [PlayStation] Another early build image. It shows Ripley 8, one of several characters you could play.

ATOM ZONE

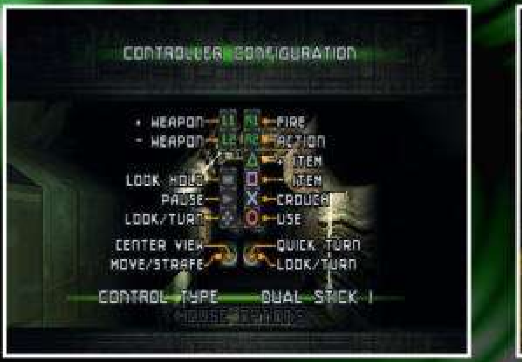
Two games for the price of one?

Near the start of the movie, the audience is introduced to the crew of the Betty with a glimpse of an arcade videogame called *Atom Zone*. Argonaut got to design and write that game, so it could be used during filming.

“There wasn’t a deal for the game that appeared in the movie. I’m sure we signed a release, but there wasn’t a contract, and we didn’t get paid for it,” reveals Jez San. “Gary Sheinwald insisted we got a screen credit though, which was all we got. We did quite a bit of work on it, effectively for free. Originally, we had the whole *Atom Zone* game playable, but the director needed a very specific set of occurrences in the game, and for it to be reproducible on demand. In the end we captured a demo, so that it wasn’t playable but was exactly what the director required.” The fictitious arcade machine *Atom Zone* appeared on-screen for barely ten seconds in the theatrical version, and the only in-game footage shown was of a spacecraft exploding in a ball of fire. However, there was a chance the playable game might have lived on. “At one point there was talk of bundling *Atom Zone* free with the *Alien Resurrection* game, but that fell by the wayside due to the enormous effort of creating the main game,” admits Jez, and whilst the *Atom Zone* cabinet can be tantalisingly seen on the Betty level in the finished PlayStation game, it remains unplayable.

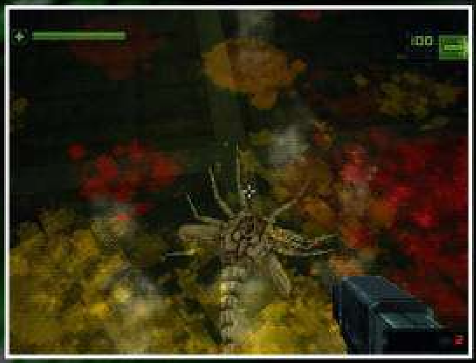
BESTING THE RESURRECTION

How to survive Argonaut's game



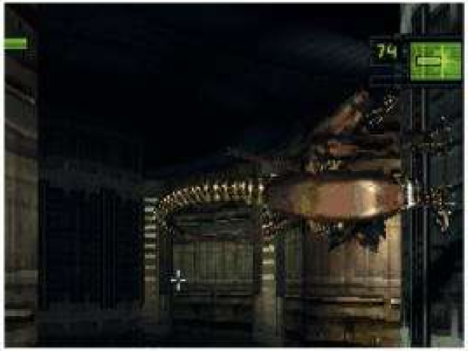
MASTER THE CONTROLS

■ Getting familiar with the control system is essential. Choose between one or two controllers, with the option to use a PlayStation mouse in one hand and a DualShock controller in the other. With just one controller, use the left stick to move and the right stick to look around.



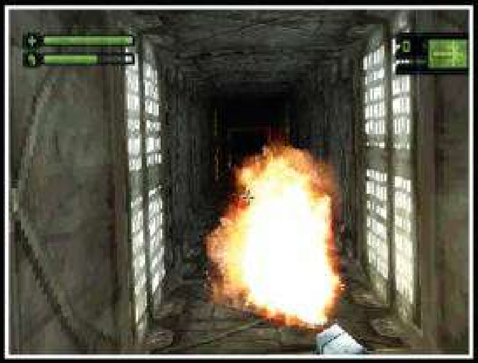
FACING THE HUGGERS

■ You hear the scuttling and the whiplashing tails as the Facehuggers approach before you see them. Sometimes the best way to defeat them before they latch onto your face is to switch to crouching mode, so you are nearer the ground, then shoot them down at their own level.



CLIMBING DOWN WALLS

■ Fully grown aliens love nothing more than climbing walls and ceilings and then dropping down behind you just before they start their attack. If you hear an alien and you start taking damage, run forward and swing around to face your attacker, firing as you go.



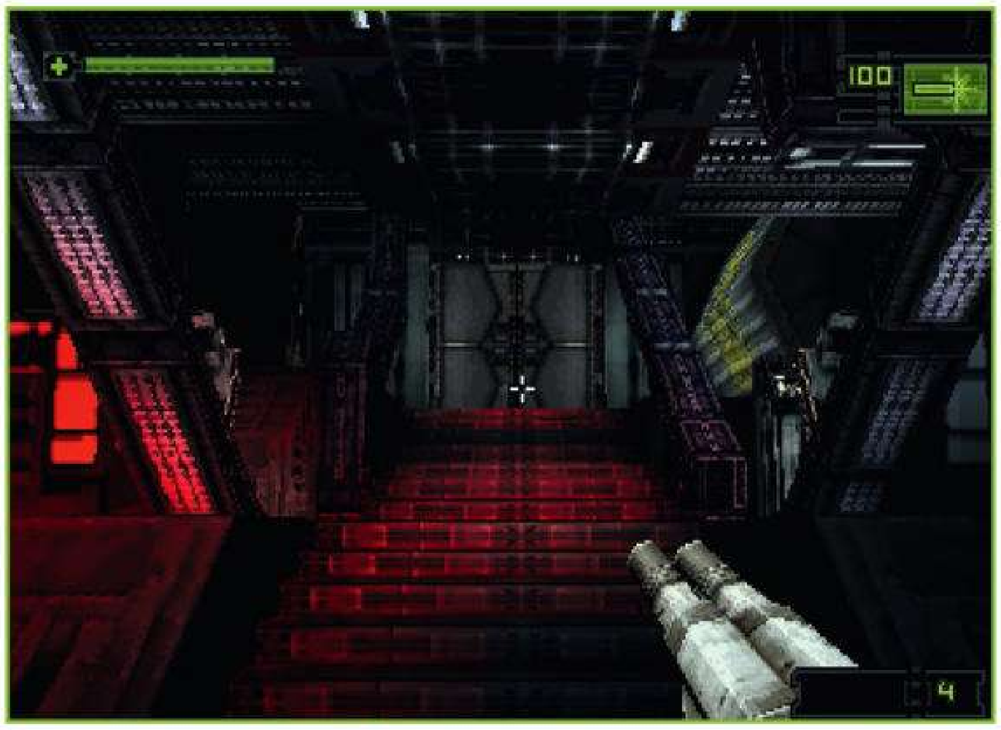
NOWHERE TO GO

■ If you think you've explored an entire level, but you can't find anywhere else to go, remember that you can crouch low and crawl through open vents, assuming there is one. Vents usually give you access to unreachable areas you might have glimpsed earlier in the level.

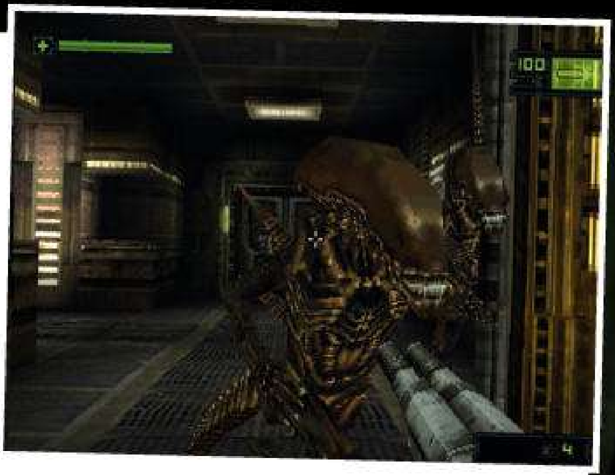
▶ Unfortunately, all these changes meant that development continued throughout 1997 and 1998, long after the film had departed cinemas, and various developers came and went at different stages of the project. The general feeling of disappointment over the film dampened enthusiasm, but Argonaut remained committed to doing as professional a job as it could.

Early versions of the *Tomb Raider*-style version included the ability to switch to a first-person view by pressing and holding a shoulder button on the PlayStation controller. The player could look around by moving the left stick at the same time, but they could not move the current character in that view. Later, a section where the player had to crawl through air vents was added, temporarily switching to a first-person perspective that did allow for movement, and the effectiveness of that approach became instantly apparent. The claustrophobic environment, and the anticipation of not seeing what was around the corner resulted in the entire game being switched to that view permanently.

"Technically the new perspective wasn't a huge change as we had a very general-purpose 3D engine, so the changes were mostly in the level designs," explains Jez. "I think the main decision to move it to first-person was so you could have stuff jump out at you, which felt more, well, *Alien*-like." Indeed, the 3D world employed for the third-person view was the same as what the player saw from that first-person perspective in the finally released game.



» [PlayStation] Many locations from the movie, including the Betty spacecraft, were rendered in 3D for the player to explore.



Unfortunately, the change to first-person led to some levels from earlier drafts of the screenplay, including the hydroponics and hospital sections, being removed. Initially, if the player was impregnated by a Facehugger, the idea was to speedrun to the nearest medical bay to get the embryonic alien removed before it was too late. That idea was ditched in favour of the portable autodoc unit, which did the surgery in situ.

Development sailed through 1999 and despite PR from Fox Interactive that promised a release in Fall 1999 for PlayStation and Windows 95/98, *Alien Resurrection* managed to miss the domestic DVD and home video releases as well as the promised Fall 1999 release date.

Argonaut's *Alien Resurrection* PlayStation game was finally completed in summer 2000 and was published in the run up to Christmas that year. However, neither the Windows 95/98 PC version nor the intended Sega Saturn version were ever finished, let alone released.

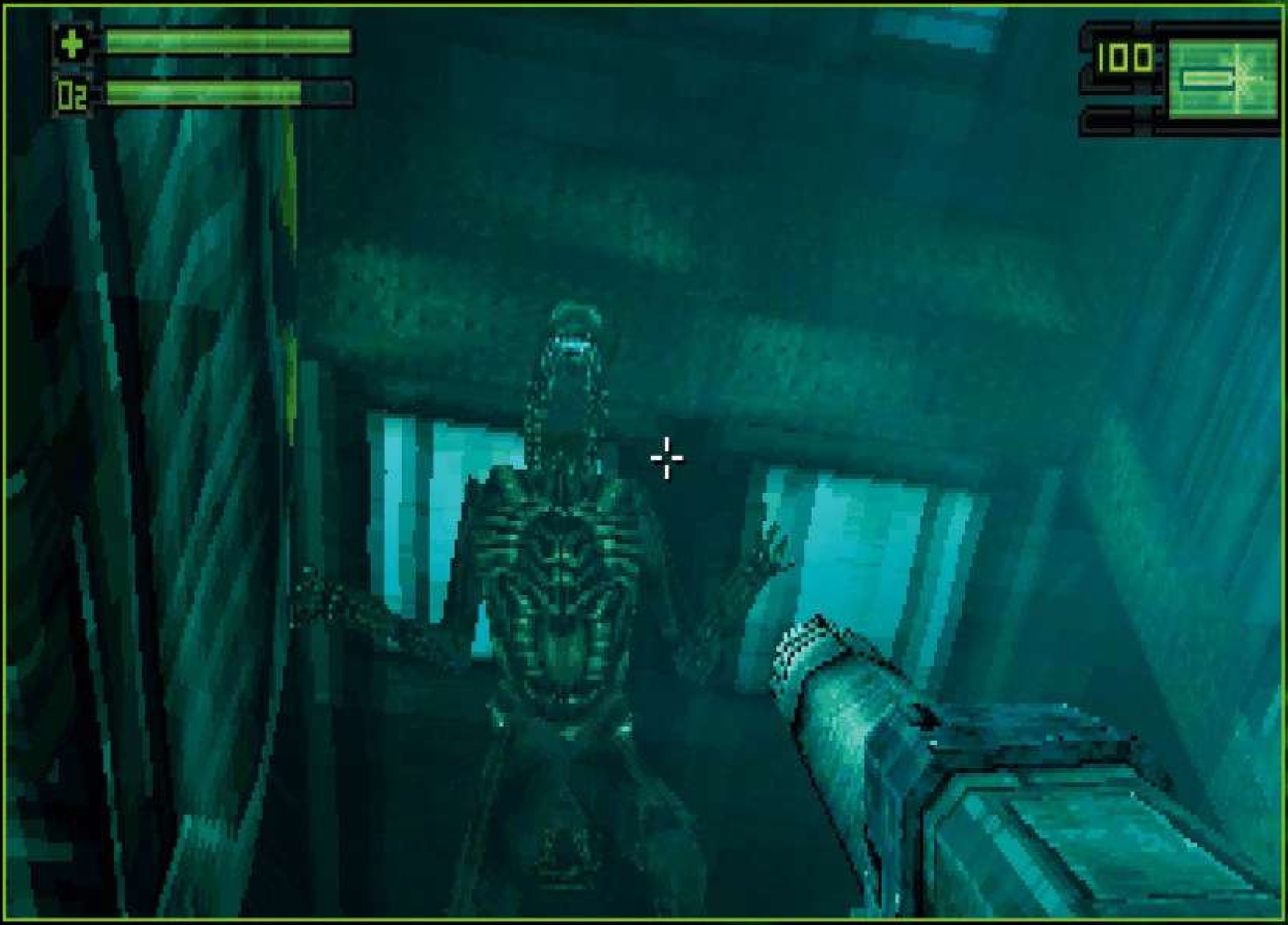
The final version featured ten expansive levels and four characters to switch between as the player made progress. Levels were mission-based, involving releasing overheating escape pods, killing all the previous failed Ripley clones, battling Facehuggers, alien warriors, military soldiers, an alien queen, the albino Newborn and ultimately escaping the USM Auriga in the Betty and blowing everything up in the process. One level included swimming, simulating the underwater scenes from the movie, and echoing the swimming sections of the first *Tomb Raider* game.

Specially recorded speech from actor Steven Gilborn, who voiced the main computer system called Father in the movie, was included. Short snatches of speech were recorded by other soundalike actors, but whilst they were included in development versions, most of the speech was removed from the final release, other than their grunts and groans in reaction to injury during the game.

Inevitably, the length of time taken by Argonaut to get the game finished took its toll. The severely extended development period, and the poor box office performance of the movie had a knock-on effect on people's appetite to play the official

SHORT BURSTS

■ Weapons and ammo are not in bountiful supply in the game, so when you get some, make sure you use them sparingly. Short, controlled bursts for rapid fire weapons like the pulse rifle will ensure you don't run out too quickly. Look out for dropped ammo near dead bodies.



» [PlayStation] In one of the missions you have to swim to escape the marauding aliens, just like in the movie.

game. Also, the original PlayStation console's popularity was starting to fade, due in part to the emergence of the brand-new PlayStation 2 console, which debuted at the same time as the *Alien Resurrection* game was published.

You could argue that the odds were already stacked against the project. *Alien Resurrection* was not the first licensed *Alien* game, and it was not the first *Alien* game to employ that first-person viewpoint either. Back in 1986, Activision UK's 8-bit game based on *Aliens* was from the rudimentary viewpoint of the player being in the locations. In 1994, Rebellion employed that view for its *Alien Vs Predator* game for the Atari Jaguar and its later *Aliens Vs Predator* game for the IBM PC released in 1999 to great acclaim, which somewhat stole *Alien Resurrection*'s thunder. That game had much more variety, a multiplayer mode and was closer in feel to the more popular *Aliens* movie that was released in the mid-Eighties. Even earlier, Probe Software unleashed *Alien Trilogy* for the Sega Saturn, Sony PlayStation and IBM PC in 1996. That game also employed the first-person viewpoint that Argonaut's game eventually employed.

» [PlayStation] Being attacked by a Facehugger gave the player limited time to find and activate an autodoc unit.

However, the game that Argonaut finally produced was technically superb. Looking at it cold, most people would assume the game was running on the new PlayStation 2. *Alien Resurrection* utilised the SCPH 1200 DualShock controller to great effect, allowing the player to move with the left stick and look around the 3D environment using the right stick. Pun definitely intended, that control system was alien to most people, and they initially struggled with it. The game was also one of the few to support the PlayStation mouse controller, which gave the player a much finer method for looking around in the first-person perspective, aiming and shooting their weapons and using items they encounter throughout the game, like interacting with security panels, buttons, wheels and so on.

» [PlayStation] As in the film, the concluding level of the game pitched Ripley 8 against the albino Newborn.

> "Technically the new perspective wasn't a huge change as we had a very general-purpose 3D engine…"
>
> Jez San

Looking back at the experience over two decades later, *Alien Resurrection* is not a project Jez recalls with much fondness. His personal involvement might have been at arm's length, but the game's elongated gestation period was part of a chain reaction that had dire consequences for Argonaut. "The whole *Alien* game turned out to be a horrendous abortion. The changes we made were for the betterment of the game, but it caused huge delays that cost us a fortune that we never earned back."

"*Alien Resurrection* was just one of a few film licence games we had in development at Fox," admits Gary. "It was problematic and very late due to being rebooted twice. The result though was a decent first-person shooter on the PlayStation, which I feel paved the way for other similar games on consoles using the DualShock sticks."

Alien Resurrection on the PlayStation is a good example of developers squeezing every last ounce out of the hardware, at a point where many developers were already shifting their focus onto the PlayStation 2 and other next-gen consoles. The game looked and sounded great, offered plenty of challenging levels to explore, and had tons of atmosphere, which is really all you could want from an *Alien* game. It is true that some people found the control system difficult, and that it could have done with a multiplayer mode, but it is an under-appreciated PlayStation first-person survival horror game that deserved more success than it got. ✱

R-Type Delta

DIFFERENT, BUT FAMILIAR

» PLAYSTATION » 1998 » IREM

While I'll always maintain that the Saturn was pretty much untouchable when it came to great shoot-'em-ups, that statement is doing Sony's PlayStation something of a disservice. Granted, Sega's console has some incredible exclusives, but the PlayStation's list isn't that shabby either and I picked up a fair few of them during the 2020 lockdown.

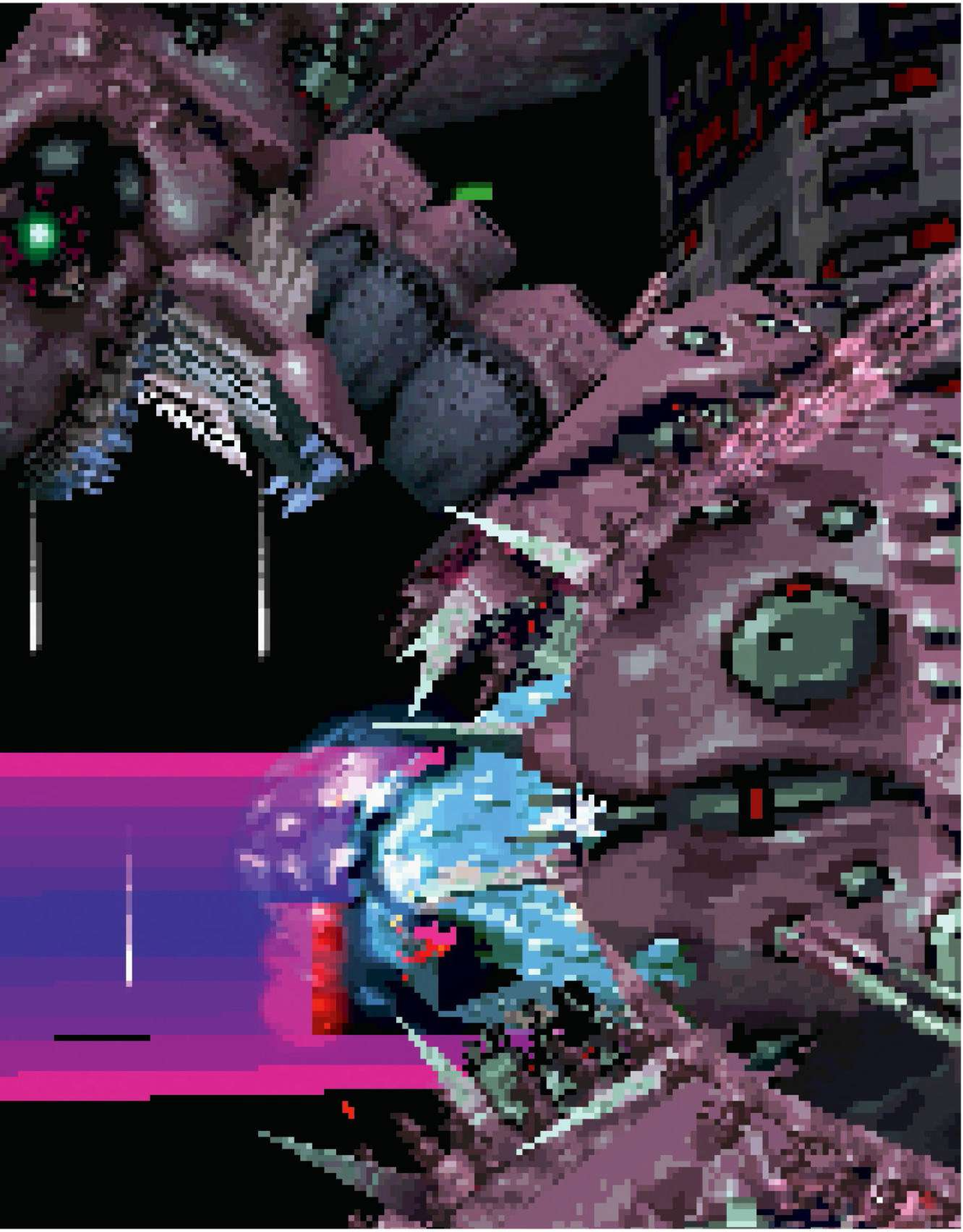
One of my purchases from that period was *R-Type Delta* and I remember putting quite a lot of time into it along with the equally brilliant *G-Darius*. I think one of the strengths of Irem's game is that it doesn't attempt to break the mould and it offers you an experience that's largely similar to what you would have played before.

Granted, you've now got a selection of different ships to choose from which feature new funky Force configurations and there's a new Dose mechanic which lets you absorb bullets to unleash a powerful Delta Attack, but otherwise this is very much the *R-Type* you played in the arcades back in 1987 (or on Sony's console if you had picked up *R-Types* which had been released earlier in the same year as *R-Type Delta*).

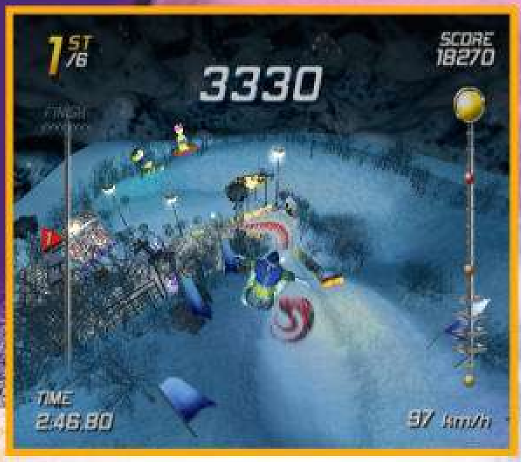
While it had interesting combat mechanics and distinctive new polygon designs, it was still easy to instantly see it was *R-Type* and it became even more obvious as you got deeper into the game, as the developers revisited earlier triumphs from the 1987 original, including the gargantuan mother ship that went on to influence countless other shoot-'em-ups.

My favourite call back to the original *R-Type* however is when you encounter Subkeratom on the penultimate stage of the game. The level itself is a tough slog through the Space Corps' headquarters which has now been overrun by the Bydo. In addition to negotiating tight passageways and a general cramped playing area you also have to deal with some deadly enemies and your own infected teammates.

The level culminates in a showdown with Subkeratom, a new deadly form of the Dobkeratops you first met in *R-Type*. It's a terrifying, but somehow comforting encounter and an interesting juxtaposition between *R-Type*'s past and future. Needless to say the two *R-Type Final* games that followed many years later walked a similar tightrope between newness and nostalgia, but *Delta* did it first and it did a damn fine job as well. *



THE HISTORY OF SSX


1ST/6
3330
SCORE 18270
FINISH
TIME 2:46.80
97 km/h

» [PS2] Even the original game knew that big jumps, scary drops and a chance to score huge trick points was a selling point.

THE PS2 HAD HUNDREDS OF EXTREME OR ZANY SPORTS TITLES TO CHOOSE FROM, BUT ONLY A FEW MANAGED TO ACHIEVE THE SAME LEVEL OF RECOGNITION AS SSX. WE EXPLORE THE 'PEAK' OF SSX'S CAREER AND HOW THE GAME TOOK THE WORLD BY (SNOW) STORM...

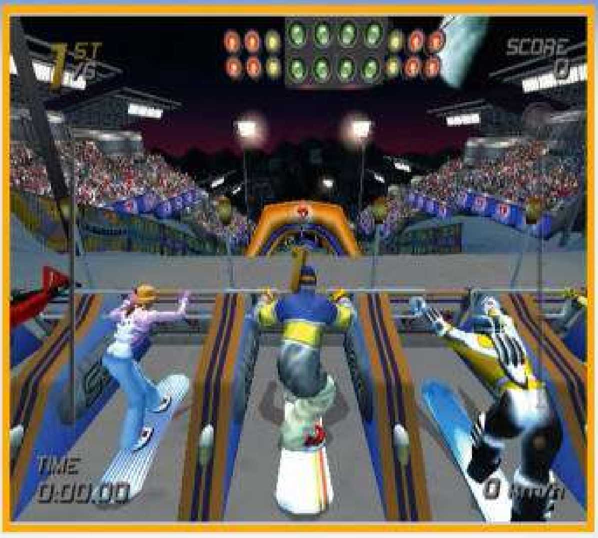
WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

Ever since Horace booked his all-inclusive trip to a mountainous resort in the Alps, videogames have had a constant relationship with winter sports. From skiing and hockey to figure skating and snowmobile races, gaming has done it all. But no winter sport has been more represented virtually than snowboarding, which has consistently beaten out the otherwise more popular sport of skiing as the number one winter sport for gaming. And when it comes to snowboard games, few names have the same reputation and adoration as *SSX*, which first landed into stardom alongside the North American launch of the PS2 in October 2000.

"It was actually the reason I was at EA," says Scott Henshaw, "I hadn't been working in games at all." Scott was about to be a father of twins at the time, so it became apparent that his current job – which had him spending alternating weeks in Silicon Valley – wasn't going to be suitable for helping to raise his two kids back in Vancouver. "Distinctive Software had just been bought by Electronic Arts," he recalls, "they were about 250 people and growing." Through a friend of a friend, Scott managed to find himself at the newly renamed EA Canada and offered a position without any details except to say it was a new IP. "There were a couple of guys there, and the producer Larry LaPierre was there, and we just started on a recruiting rampage, and we ramped up the first 20-odd people. It was a startup mentality back then, we had space that we were renting in a building. There was no big EA Campus or anything, it was a bunch of guys who put together a bunch of games and *just* got bought out by EA and so there was money to do things but nothing fancy. We'd expand into a space and we'd have a contractor come in and saw a door opening from one area to another, and we were laying network cables on the weekend ourselves."

The game that would go on to be called *SSX* had already been sold as a concept, however, but it just needed someone to get it off the ground. "The idea really came from the exec producer, Steve Rechtschaffner," continues Scott. "He had done this boardercross event thing from his background, he was an ex-US ski team guy, he was a marketing guy through and through and he had sold it to the company – it was a big pitch he did. So he was committed at that point, but didn't know how to do it. So he got Larry and I involved."

In between recruiting, setting up desks and buying office necessities with the new EA-funded credit card, Scott and Larry's work was to set up the design of what the game was going to be. This essentially came down to one question: is it going to be a racing game or a trick game? "We had a couple of influences that we were playing from, you know, you do your research so you go and find as many things that are close or similar. We went and grabbed *1080° Snowboarding,* we were looking at anything at all that's similar and trying to identify the



» [PS2] Much like *Mario Kart*'s boosted start, *SSX* came with its own way of starting each race ahead of the pack that added some early drama.

SSX BEYOND PS2

WHAT HAPPENED TO SSX NEXT?

SSX Blur

Since it was released on the Nintendo Wii at a time when everyone was still trying to crack Nintendo's motion control-based console, you can probably assume how *SSX Blur* turned out. The game itself features a lot of copy-and-paste content from previous games, all affixed to slightly awkward motion controls. The gimmick here was the use of the Wiimote to draw a specific shape on the screen to activate an Uber Trick, though the option to fling snowballs at opponents was a humorous little addition. The problem wasn't that it was necessarily a bad game, just that its developers hadn't yet learnt what worked on Wii, and in that sense it couldn't really offer anything new or novel that the series hadn't already done better previously.

SSX (2012)

Controversially, the 2012 reboot of *SSX* was originally announced as *SSX: Deadly Descents* alongside a very dramatic CG trailer that fans likened to *Call Of Duty.* The team needed to do some backtracking somewhat to maintain the hype, and that's likely why Tricky mode returned. However, the ghost of that darker vision lived on in the game, with stages that weren't about racing or tricking but rather surviving avalanches, darkness or freezing temperatures. Overall it was a solid experience even if it did lose a lot of the tone that players loved about the series. The always-online world of gaming was better suited to the time trial and score attack-based stages, though, since it meant there was a constant stream of new challenges from friends and online leaderboards.

LEAVING THE COMPETITION PISTE

THE RIVALS SSX WAS UP AGAINST

1080° SNOWBOARDING

TIME
DAMAGE
1st

Like *Cool Boarders*, this is the granddaddy of modern snowboarding games. It released on N64 in 1998 and practically every snowboarding or skiing game since has looked to this classic for reference, and understandably so. Even now *1080°* is looked back on fondly, arguably even more so than *SSX Tricky*.

AMPED: FREESTYLE SNOWBOARDING

Launching exclusively on Xbox a year after the original *SSX* and running through to *Amped 3* in 2006, this series was Microsoft's attempt to tap into the extreme sports genre that was all the rage thanks to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. Its focus was more on tricks instead of racing and it gave you various tasks as you tackled the huge mountains. Sadly, it never garnered the recognition it deserved. [It's great - Ed]

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

Activision had previously tried to leverage a popular snowboarder for its own attempt at a snowboarding title, but it was Ubisoft that snapped up superstar boarder Shaun White for this 2008 release. It had nothing on *SSX*, however, and ultimately was more known for its silly Wii Balance Board controls than for its core gameplay.

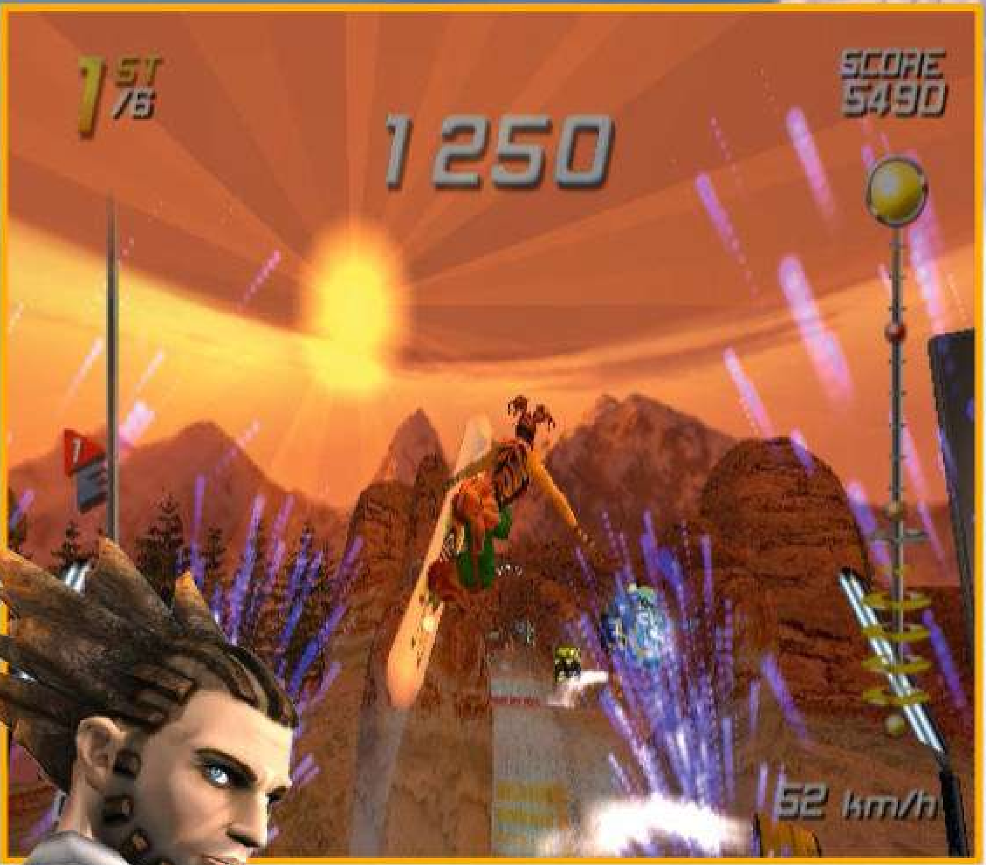
EVOLUTION SNOWBOARDING

TIME LIMIT
POINT
KONAMI
GRAB BONUS

Every major publisher tried its hand at breaking *SSX*, including Konami who used its previous *Evolution Skateboarding* brand with a snowy rendition. The difference here was more *Road Rage*-style combat as you hurtle down the mountain, which could have been fun if not for the fact that it was just a bad game.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

OK, so the board might be different but there's no denying that *Tony Hawk*'s really set something rolling after the release of *Pro Skater*. While the two weren't directly similar, they were competing for the same audience at a time where more and more innovation was needed to maintain steady consecutive success.

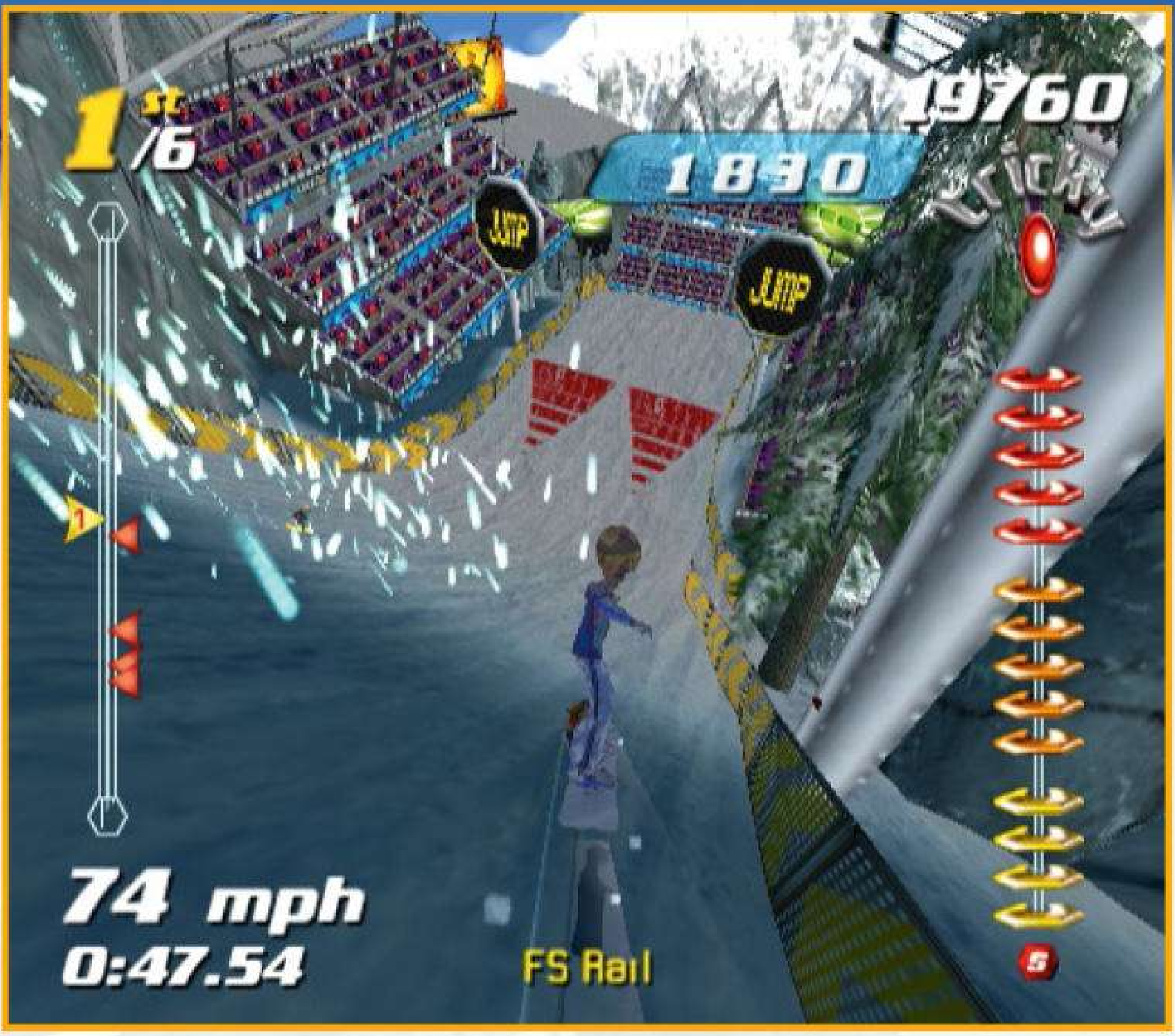


» [PS2] Random fireworks and glorious, mountainous vistas might not be necessary, but they add to the thrill that is *SSX*.

thing that was going to make us feel a little bit unique." But the game that had the biggest impact on the direction for *SSX* was in fact the arcade racing game *San Francisco Rush: Extreme Racing*.

"Larry and I both loved the game, and Steve Rechtschaffner was pretty impulsive with this stuff and he went and found a couple of cabinets linked and put them in the basement," explains Scott. "So Larry and I spent a significant amount of time just playing, dissecting and going through *SF: Rush* in every aspect." This led to *SSX* leaning more towards the racing side of snowboarding with more exaggerated race courses. The prototype was created with that initial team of 20-25 staff members, and interest in the game began to grow internally. "Normally games would take about a year to make, we took significantly longer," admits Scott. "Part of that was attributed to the fact that once we started to build the prototype, the company guys were starting to think, 'Well, we want to launch this as a launch title somewhere.'"

EA's position around the turn of the millennium was already significant, not in the least thanks to new non-sports hits like *Need For Speed* and *Medal Of Honor*. "Don Mattrick and company were constantly talking to game companies about how they could help support and grow," says Scott, suggesting that with a new generation of consoles on the horizon, EA was ready to start preparing for a new console launch. "Long-story short, the Dreamcast guys were making a good push and Microsoft got involved to build their operating system, and we thought, 'OK, this is going to make a good splash, we'll do a better job with the game because it'll be a launch title.' And then Microsoft pulled their bait and switch, so basically Microsoft built the operating system and then about three months before they launched the Dreamcast, Microsoft pulled out completely." With the potential of the Dreamcast now



» [PS2] "It's tricky to rock a rhyme, to rock a rhyme that's right on time. It's tricky… it's tricky." There you go, now you can't get it out of your head either

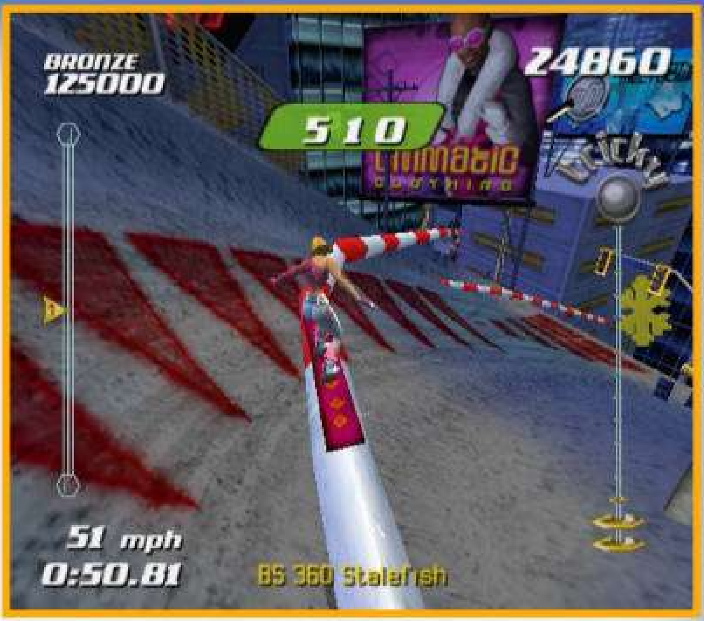
hanging in the balance, Don Mattrick decided to speak with Sony – only to learn that the PS2 was on the way. "They said, 'Why don't we get you one?' And they did, I had a hand-soldered PS2 sitting on my desk that took three months to get through customs because they thought it was a missile guidance system."

Initially the project was planned for the Japanese launch of the PS2 in March 2000, and this meant the team needed to work exhaustive hours to reach the expected deadline. This wasn't helped, of course, by the technical challenges that would be faced. Despite being on a new generation of hardware, there were still restrictions that were in place if *SSX* was going to truly sell its fast-paced, extreme winter sports experience. "Part of the problem is that ski hills are generally no more than 45 degrees in slope, and at 45 degrees no amount of tuning is going to make things feel fast and exciting," explains Scott. "And the team next to us was the *Need For Speed* team, and with them we had a few conversations and they showed us myriad camera tricks to play. Things like when you accelerate, the camera gets closer to the player and falls behind." But there were still hard limits to the hardware, too, ones that severely restricted the game's design.

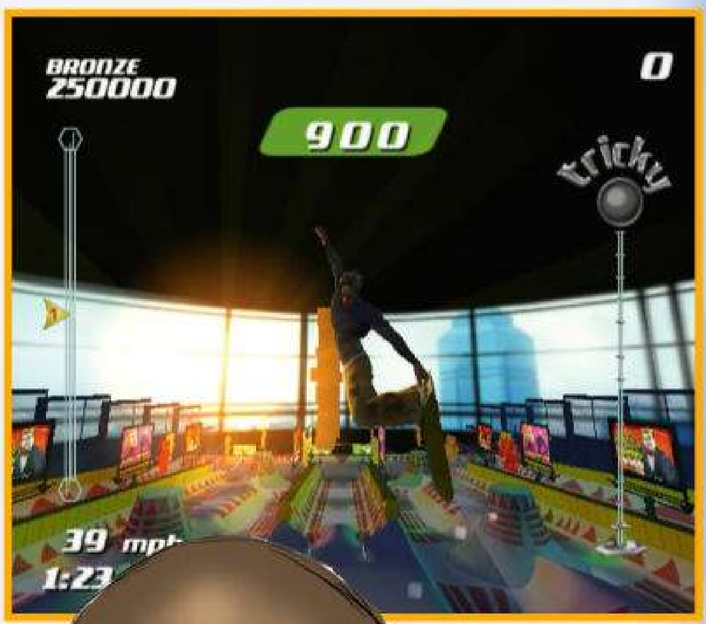
The main problem was that the game just didn't feel fast enough, but luckily the solution was surprisingly simpler than anything the *Need For Speed* guys could have offered. "One artist stayed late one day, took the whole world and tipped it up," says Scott. "We had kept insisting on having to be close to realism because we're doing everything based on physics, but we played it the next day and it felt great. He said, 'I took the world and tipped it up at 70 degrees and I tipped the trees out so it only looks like 45 degrees.' It's just simple art, creative-brain thinking."

Just as the team were ready to ship, however, EA decided that the Japanese launch perhaps wasn't going to cut it after all, and so the deadline was moved to October meaning another six months of gruelling crunch. With the internal politics of EA pushing against *SSX*, it was an opportunity for the new EA Canada to raise the bar for its quality – even if it did mean ultimately leading to burnout among team members. They were passionate about doing something new and exciting, and were willing to do it – but it had big effects on morale. The reward, then, was its release, which was met with unanimous praise for its smooth, slick gameplay, the equal reliance on both tricking *and* racing and the unique dynamic audio functionality – which had the music's intensity scale up or down depending on the player's performance. "So when the first one launched and seemed to be relatively successful, they asked us if we would like to do another," says Scott. "We had a really burned-out team, but we had a little bit of success to build on and so we had to make some choices. So we said, 'Yeah we'll do it, but we'll do it in a shorter time frame, with more people and here's some conditions under what we want to work.'"

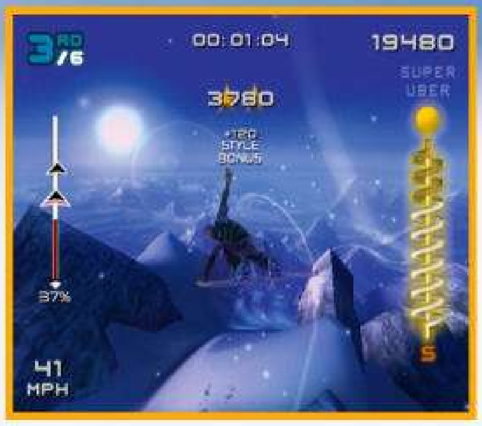
Comparatively, the sequel was much easier. From a design standpoint, Larry and Steve had kept note of all the features that they had to cut, even despite the additional six months of development. "We were working from a position where we already knew what we were gonna build," recalls Scott, "because it was all the stuff that we'd already left off the end." Now the team had an opportunity to build the true edition of the game that they had ▶



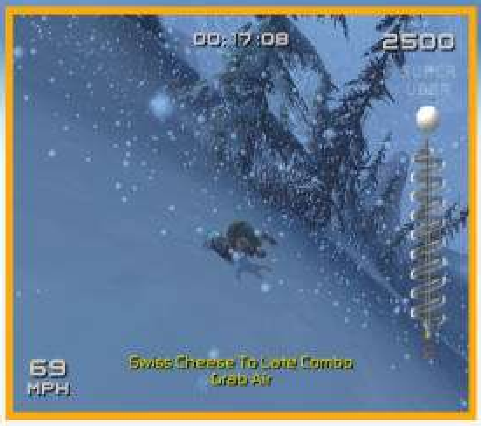
» [PS2] All but two of the stages were copied over from the original game, though *Tricky* remixed them to add in new shortcuts or level design elements.



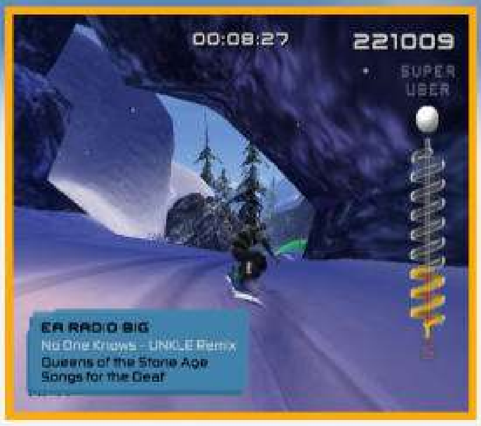
» [PS2] Despite being the exact same engine as the original, *Tricky* still managed to up its game in terms of visual fidelity.



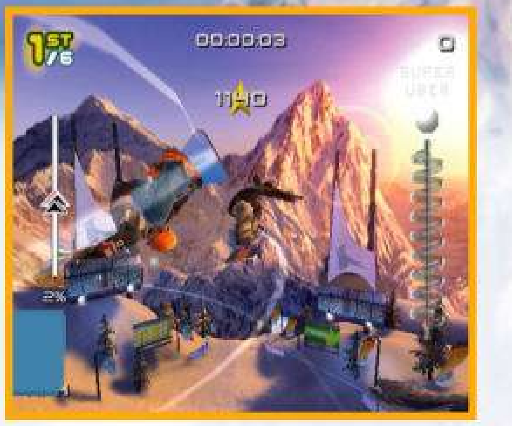
» [PS2] Tricking in *SSX 3* was considerably enhanced, not only making it easier to do but also making it feel a lot more rewarding and impactful.



» [PS2] Weather effects in *SSX 3* accompanied specific parts of the map, and were a precursor to the 'Deadly Descents' stuff in the 2012 game.



» [PS2] *SSX 3* was the debut for DJ Atomica, the fictional radio host that was present in a number of EA games – including *Burnout Paradise*.



» [PS2] Riding a full peak in *SSX 3* meant starting at the dangerous mountainous areas at the top, down to the pistes and the groomed trick parks at the bottom.

▶ wanted to make, with the added benefit of hindsight and player feedback. "I would say the biggest feedback we got was the mix of tricks versus racing," says Scott. "We had stumbled across that in the first game, but not elaborated on it. But more people enjoyed the tricks than we had anticipated." As a result, for the second game tricking was "going to be the upsell", and thus *SSX Tricky* was born.

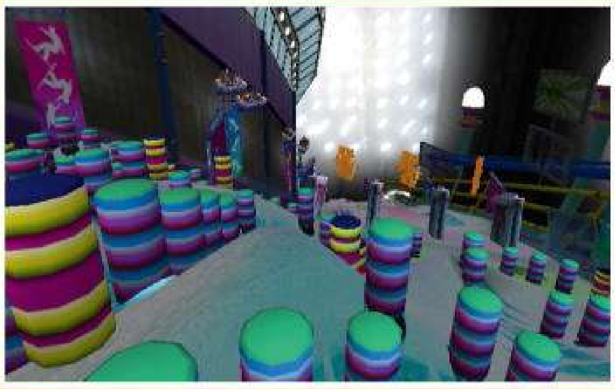
This time around the development was not so convoluted. The engine had already been built with the previous game, the team mostly knew what it needed to make and now the pressure of fitting into a launch window was gone. The team had ballooned in size, too, from its original 25 to a new 60-odd team, with the former developers acting as the experts to those new juniors. As a result, the entire thing was complete in only eight months – versus the original's two years. "The attitude on the team was very much more – I wouldn't say relaxed – but there wasn't the pressure of having to prove yourself. We had a little bit of time and space to do the things we wanted to do, we're not going to reinvent everything." The goal was instead to refine the overall experience, improve what needed work, add what the team had to remove during development of the first game and ultimately create a game that could cement *SSX* as a franchise to build on, rather than a one-hit wonder. Released in November 2001, *SSX Tricky* was more of a remix of the original game (there were only two completely new levels), but came with a much higher level of production. The graphics were improved, an all-star cast was brought in to voice the different characters and of course the iconic addition of Run DMC's *It's Tricky* just helped to add to the vibe of barrelling down a mountain tricking all the way. The latter was especially important for the big new feature: Uber Tricks, which could be executed once a meter was filled and if they were landed would result in a short burst of unlimited speed boosts.

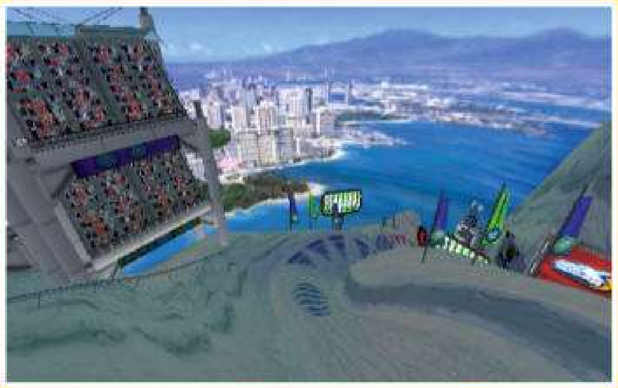
To this day *Tricky* is considered to be the best in the series, despite the improvements that came afterwards. However, this isn't a sentiment that Scott shares. "I would say to go back and play it again. There is this perception that old was better and good, but it's not until you get your hands on it that you go, 'Well, there are issues… and we can do better.'" The same happened with the third game in the series, which this time was a bit more of an overhaul than *Tricky* had been. For one thing, it was abundantly clear that open-world gaming was where the PS2 was taking gaming, and *SSX* had to follow suit. "We tore *SSX Tricky* apart," says Scott, "What are all the things that are painful? Broken? Not fun? Restrictive? We were starting to recognise that we were being very old school and restrictive in what we let players do and when we let them do it. And so we wanted to open that world up a little bit, and it wasn't just the world but also in terms of the way the characters worked, and the animations and the physics needed to feel smoother and more natural."

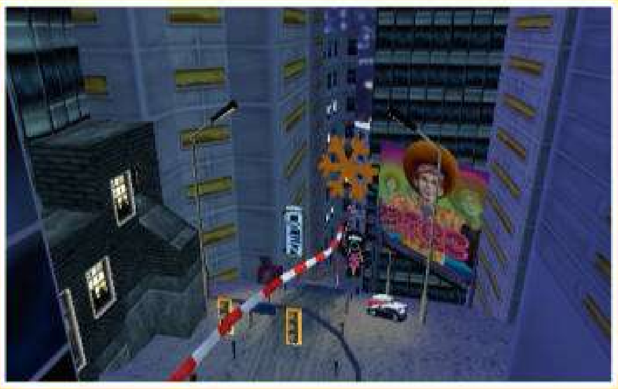
The development was a little longer this time around, with *SSX3* releasing in October 2003 across a number of platforms. The move to an open world was significant, but other areas were improved too. The Uber Trick system was enhanced to allow for multiple stages – rewarding those who could maintain a steady flow of tricks – while the visuals were also given an upgrade. "I think *Tricky* was the one that hit the nerve of the feedback loop between tricking to go faster," says Scott. "*SSX3* delivered better on it – it was smoother and a better technological system." The PS2 version even came with a fairly robust online multiplayer mode, though like so many online console games of the era it didn't really get the attention that EA might have wanted.

LEVELLING UP

A LOOK AT THE BEST SSX LEVELS







TOKYO MEGAPLEX

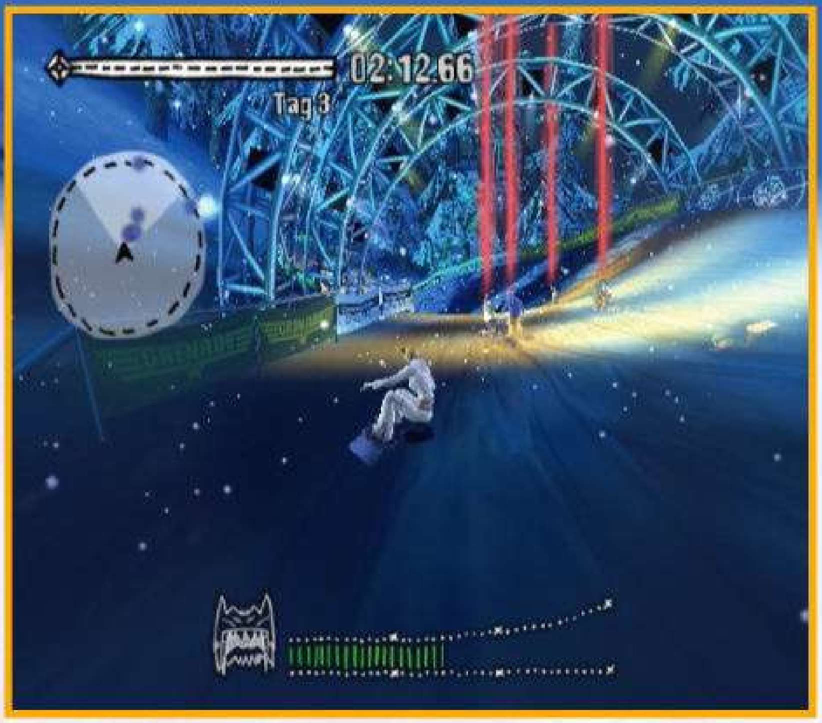
Arguably the most iconic level of the series, Tokyo Megaplex is a crazy, quirky design that shuns most of *SSX*'s previous level design in favour of something quite outrageous. Based on a pinball-machine design, this level starts by flinging you high into the air and then tasks you with evading flippers, blockers and bumpers all while tricking and boosting.

ALOHA ICE JAM

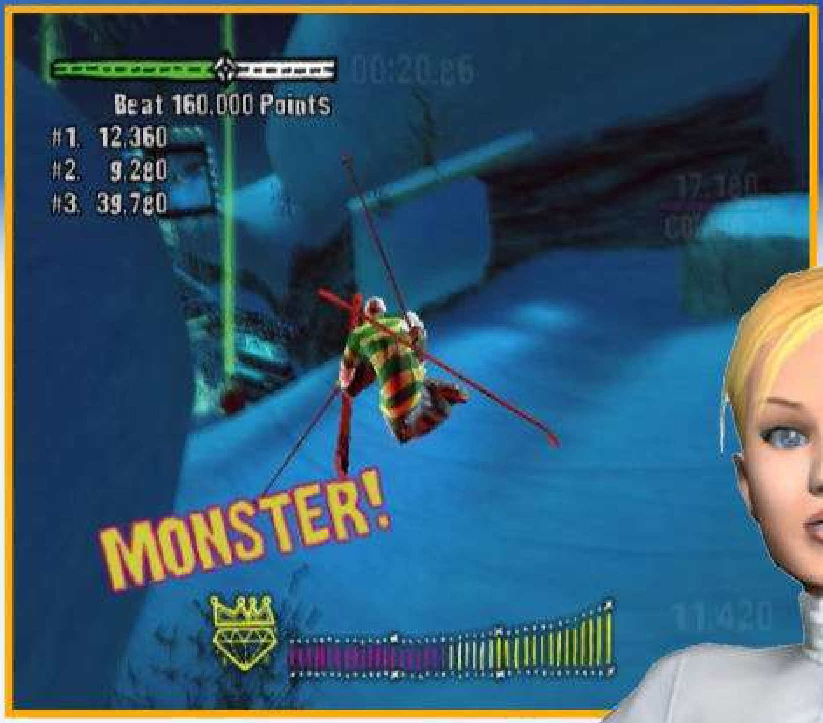
With the warm Hawaiian climate, it's perhaps no surprise that Aloha Ice Jam features prominent water pipes and flowing streams (which slightly boost your speed) as course features. It's a particularly good level because it's more open than most, meaning there's a lot to explore – especially with the number of shortcuts you can find.

MERCURY CITY MELTDOWN

Riding through a neon-lit city is automatically a novel experience, but the design of this stage made it immediately popular with a good range of shortcuts to look for and routes to practice. This stage would later get incorporated into something very familiar in *SSX3*, as well, proving it was a solid idea to include.



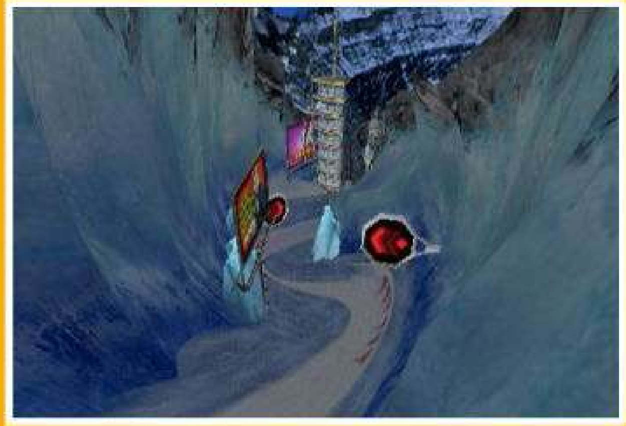
» [PS2] *On Tour* came with a much greater variety to its levels with more specific challenges and tasks beyond just racing to first place.



» [PS2] Uber Tricks were replaced with Monster Tricks in *SSX: On Tour*. They functioned exactly the same way, however.

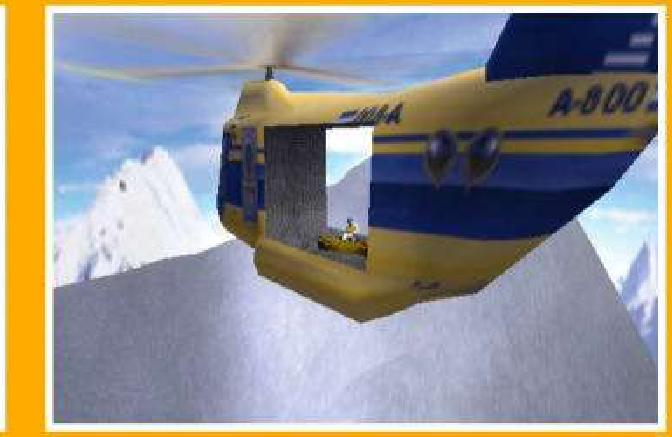
Despite the reputation that has since followed *SSX Tricky*, *SSX3* was the series' biggest success commercially and critically. It lost some of the colourful style of *Tricky*, but overall it was a way more modern and slick approach to the core gameplay that had been set in the preceding two games. During this time, however, a new general manager came into EA Canada, and through that there was a good deal of shifts within teams as they repositioned staff based on where their skills lay. With EA Canada now a significant branch of the Electronic Arts machine, a number of projects needed help getting off the ground. Scott was called on to handle these, to repeat his successes in building new IPs, and he explains that the veteran core team behind *SSX* was ultimately moved away from the franchise. "You get a trust with a certain group and that just drives it," says Scott of how he ended up bringing the team away from *SSX* and over onto other projects, including the innovative *Skate*.

There was still an opportunity for one more *SSX* game on PS2, however, and without the passion of that veteran team, it lost some of that magic. *SSX On Tour* introduced custom characters for the first time and focused on giving the player agency over who they played as. There was no online mode in favour of a stronger single-player, as well as a controversial sketch book-esque art style that did not sit well with fans. Like so many sports games of the time, *On Tour* was about building up the player character's fame to become the number one snowboarding (or skiing, which was a new addition) legend. Though *SSX On Tour* was received well when it released in October 2005, it was not nearly as popular as the previous two games, ultimately making the final release on PS2 more wet snow than powder day. Even so, the series as a whole may well have peaked on PS2, likely in part due to the determination of that dedicated team, "It was just a matter of passionate people dumping hours into it," says Scott of the original team. "It did gel that group together. So much so that Steve Rechtschaffner held a reunion in 2020, 20 years later, and 23 or the original 25 people showed up, we're all still working games, we're all still in the same city." *



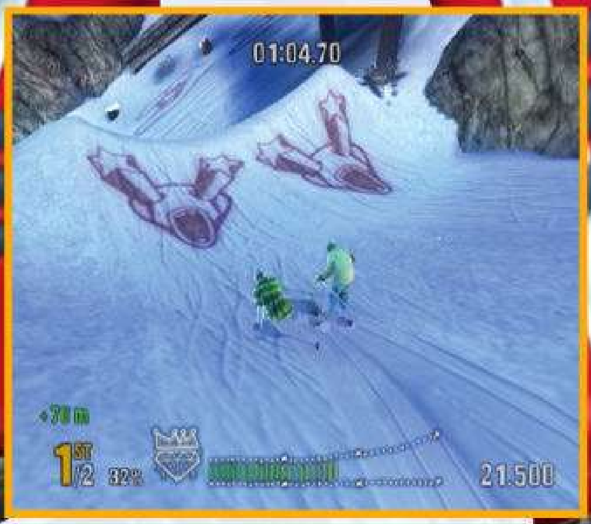
ALASKA

The dramatic scenery of this stage – which was one of the two all-new levels added in *SSX Tricky* – really makes this memorable as you careen between tall rocky valleys, giant ice spikes and through ice-covered caves, and do some incredible jumps too. It's another interesting course that is open to plenty of deep exploration.



UNTRACKED

By the standards of what makes a 'good' *SSX* level, Untracked fails to meet any expectation. However, this is a completely track-free stage without goals or direction and is unlocked when completing *SSX* or *SSX Tricky*, making it the only time those games offered the feeling of freedom when riding out powder-covered back country.



» [PS2] *On Tour* introduced additional boarders who populated the slopes as a way to score easy bonus points not unlike *Burnout*'s own 'Close Call' feature.

THE MAKING OF

CRASH BANDICOOT FUSION & SPYRO FUSION

AFTER BOTH DOMINATING THE LATE-NINETIES WITH TRILOGIES ON SONY'S PLAYSTATION, TWO ICONS CAME TOGETHER FOR THE ULTIMATE CROSSOVER. ALMOST TWO DECADES ON, HERE'S HOW CRASH AND SPYRO'S HANDHELD TEAM-UP ADVENTURE CAME TO BE

WORDS BY AARON POTTER

SPYRO ORANGE
GAME BOY ADVANCE
CRASH PURPLE
GAME BOY ADVANCE

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

» **DEVELOPER**: VICARIOUS VISIONS

» **RELEASED:** 2004

» **PLATFORM:** GBA

» **GENRE**: PLATFORMER/ MINIGAMES

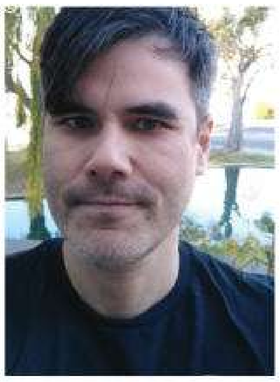
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CRASH BANDICOOT: THE HUGE ADVENTURE
SYSTEM: GBA
YEAR: 2002

CRASH NITRO KART (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: GBA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2003

SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE
SYSTEM: 3DS
YEAR: 2011

While a certain moustachioed plumber may have established the basic tenets of platforming in 3D, it was the handful of plucky heroes that followed who helped solidify the new genre's staying power. Sony's need to compete against Nintendo (and offer PlayStation owners an appropriate rival to *Super Mario 64*) spurred much invention and development ingenuity, until eventually Naughty Dog's Crash Bandicoot and Insomniac's Spyro The Dragon were born out of a joint publishing deal with Universal Interactive. Both characters seemed purposely engineered to engage younger audiences, quickly garnering the status of PlayStation 'mascot' by offering up their own brand of colourful worlds to explore and jump through. They differed significantly from Mario, though, by touting a lot more attitude than what Nintendo would ever dare attempt.



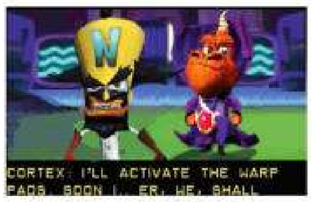
» Jonny Russell is credited as co-programmer on both games, but mostly oversaw *Crash Fusion*.

Fast forward to the early Noughties, and the jump to a totally new console generation was seen by Universal as a good excuse to have Crash and Spyro go multi-platform. After all, both icons received celebrated trilogies on the original PlayStation. Surely they would be able to do it again elsewhere? In reality, the two unfortunately struggled to rouse quite the same level of excitement as they did before.

The likes of Traveller's Tales and Digital Eclipse released decent enough series entries, true, but nothing ever came close to the quality of, say, *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back* or *Spyro: Year Of The Dragon*. Thus a plan was hatched to try and make both franchises jump for critical and commercial joy once more.

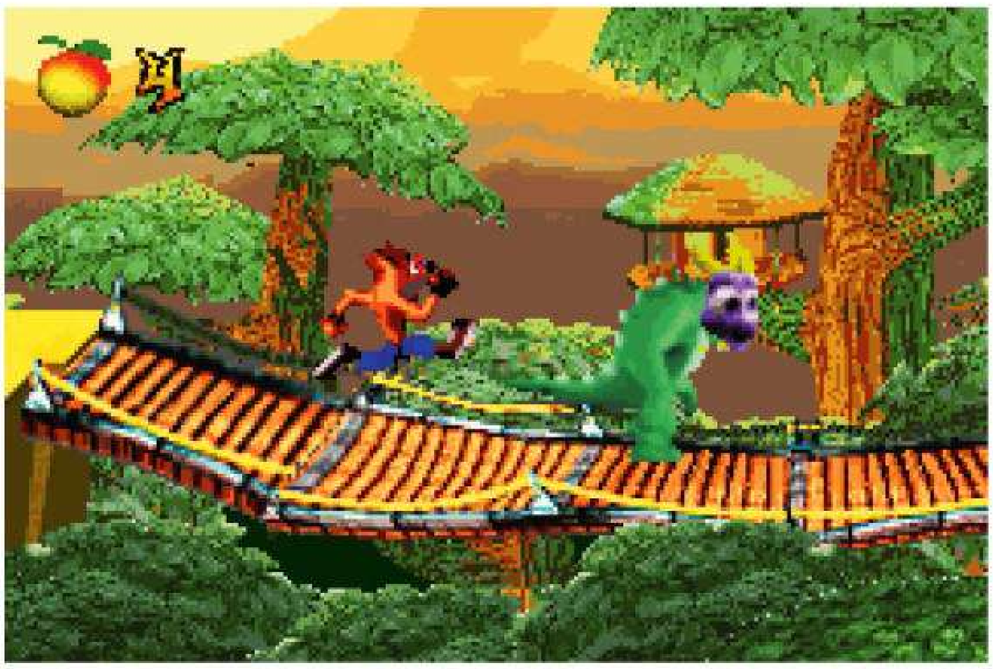
"We had already done two handheld side-scrolling *Crash Bandicoot* titles at that point, so having us work on a third game seemed a safe bet," recalls Jonathan (Jonny) Russell, one of the lead programmers at Vicarious Visions circa 2003. Having just finished up work on *Crash: Nitro Kart*, recently renamed publisher Vivendi Universal, floated the idea of potentially crossing over the orange bandicoot and purple dragon's two worlds to the team. Initially, the plan was for Jonny and co to just make another standard *Crash* sequel, following up *Crash Bandicoot: The Huge Adventure* or *N-Tranced* to cap off its trilogy on the Game Boy Advance. Vivendi, however, had other plans.

"It was Vivendi's idea for us to also do a *Spyro* game, that could be a companion SKU [Stock Keeping Unit]," Jonny explains. Spyro had previously been in isometric games on handheld at a different studio, so the idea of having the two meet on the still flourishing GBA didn't seem out of the question. Having it occur on a handheld instead of a home console, Jonny reveals, would also "be cheaper to produce because one studio could handle both duties". However, it was another high-flying Nintendo

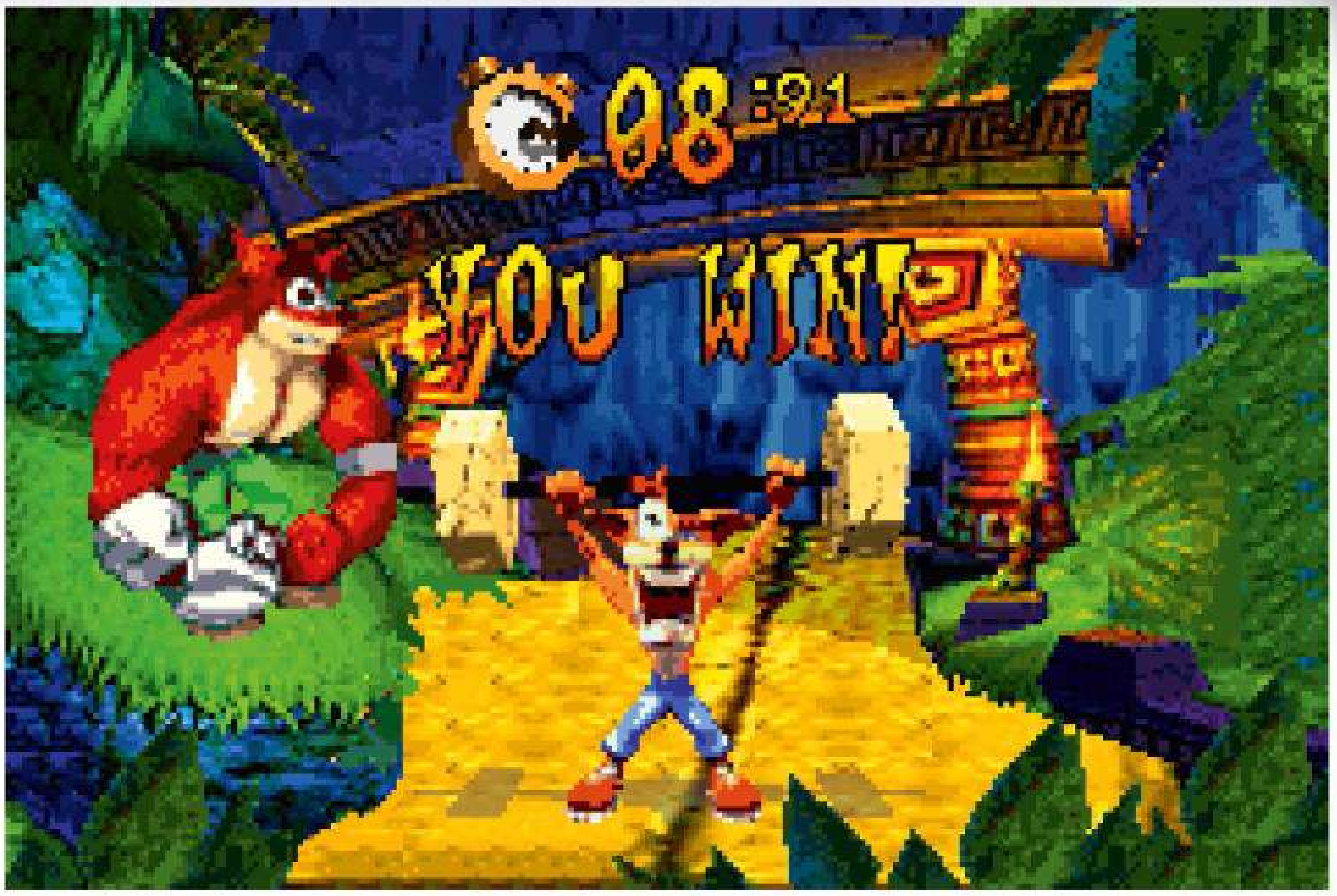


CORTEX: I'LL ACTIVATE THE WARP PADS SOON I.. ER, HE, SHALL

» [GBA] Neo Cortex and Ripto's dastardly plan involves disguising minions as versions of Crash and Spyro, turning them against one another.



» [GBA] Vicarious Visions was able to leverage existing art assets from its previous GBA games to inform Crash's hub world exploration.



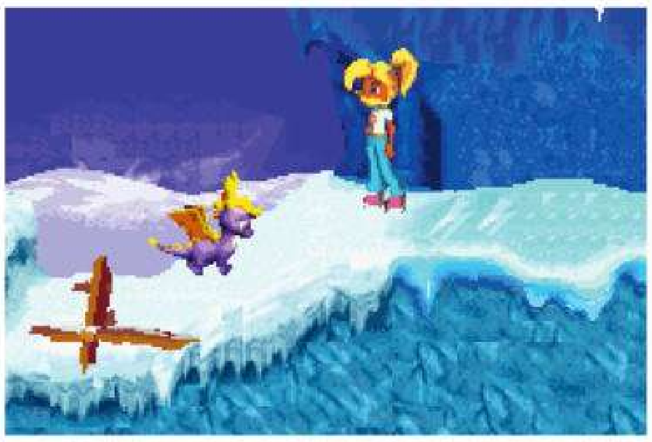
» [GBA] Crash's closest bodybuilding confidant, Crunch Bandicoot, turns up in a weightlifting minigame. How fast can you tap that A button?

franchise that also served as inspiration behind the decision. "I know that they were probably hoping to duplicate the dual SKU success of *Pokémon*," he says. In some ways, the project started out life even more ambitiously because "unlike *Pokémon* the two games we made were mostly unique and did not share many assets".

Before you knew it, Vicarious Visions split into separate teams and development was started on two platforming-inspired minigame collections that would later become known as *Crash Bandicoot Fusion* and *Spyro Orange*. A basic story was penned for *Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rampage* and *Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy*, as they were known in the US, which saw the titular enemies from both respective franchises team up in the effort to finally defeat our much beloved heroes for good. And true, while any proper narrative complexity would largely be hampered by the strict hardware limitations, the basic plot – in which portals from the two universes begin to bleed on into one another – did well to make each game genuinely feel like individual halves of the same whole. Only by playing both stories would players understand all that was happening.

> "IT WAS VIVENDI'S IDEA FOR US TO ALSO DO A SPYRO GAME"
> **JONNY RUSSELL**

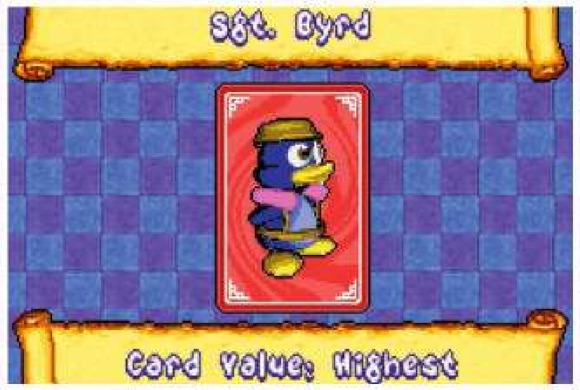
Spyro and Crash were known for their platforming prowess, so why go the minigame collection route for such an ambitious crossover? Vicarious Visions and Vivendi thought it an ideal approach when wanting to create a strong sense of connectivity between the two games, in a way that wouldn't lose the essence of either. Especially since, while both franchises had already successfully made the transition to handheld, Spyro in particular required a drastically different design approach to what had come before. Vicarious Visions, therefore, pulled from its most recent experience developing handheld *Crash* games to try and make up for the time needed to make the purple dragon work.



» [GBA] Both games see *Crash* and *Spyro*'s cast of ancillary characters pop up every now and then to impart useful advice.

Speaking to the previous *Crash Bandicoot* titles on Game Boy Advance, "It helped a lot because we had those established games to work off of to hit the ground running", recalls Jonny. No such access existed for the other lead character, however. "Spyro had to start from scratch, as it was the first time he had been in a side-scrolling game, so we had to work out the size of the character, handling, etc without a lot of previously done work to fall back on." Nailing what Spyro would feel like on a 2D plane was a crucial element to get right because, when not engaging in the likes of racing, dodging and platforming challenges that make up the bulk of both titles, Spyro and Crash both needed to move around their unique hub worlds naturally.

Vicarious Visions ultimately managed to find the perfect middle ground. Crash Bandicoot, as mentioned, remained largely unchanged when moving from minigame to minigame, collecting ▶

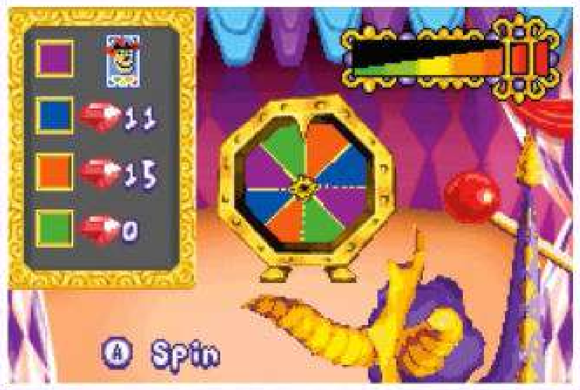


TRADING PLACES

GATHER CARDS IN A 'COLLECT THEM ALL' CROSSOVER ADVENTURE

■ Since *Crash Fusion* and *Spyro Fusion* were highly inspired by *Pokémon*'s dual release strategy, it made sense to Vivendi and Vicarious Visions to also capitalise on the idea of trading. This came in the form of collectible character cards littered throughout both adventures, with certain cards remaining exclusive to each game. Cards were given a specific rarity depending on the calibre of character they presented. Crash and Spyro, for instance, were given the highest value, while simple grunt enemies were made the most common. The main way you collect cards in-game is by completing minigames naturally, though certain ones were also sprinkled in award positions in each hub world.

Aside from that, you could also visit one of Moneybags' shops to either buy a random card outright using any gathered gems or Wumpa Fruit, or try your luck on his wheel spin minigame. The trading cards were a good idea to promote crossplay between characters, yet they don't really serve a higher function outside of their core collectible aspect. Unless you were a die-hard *Crash*/*Spyro* fan or devout completionist, therefore, the trading cards had only limited use. They weren't quite as addictive as pocket creatures you can battle.

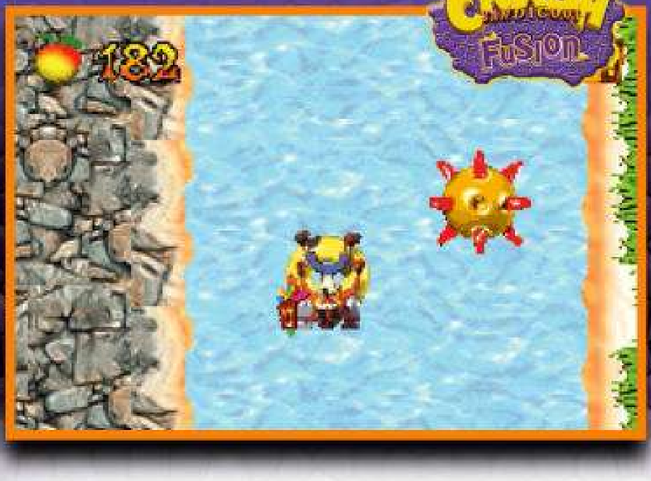


MINIGAME MADNESS

THERE ARE DOZENS OF CREATIVE CHALLENGES TO KEEP THINGS FRESH

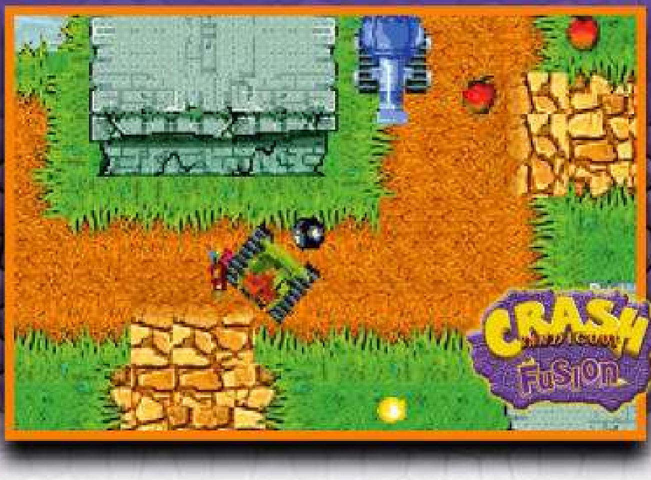
CRASHIN' DOWN THE RIVER

■ Highly inspired by the river levels found in the original *Crash Bandicoot* trilogy on PlayStation, Crashin' Down The River is an excellent translation of the marsupial's water-boosting exploits. You must make your way down a river on a dingy, dodging whirlpools and mines while knowing when to boost.



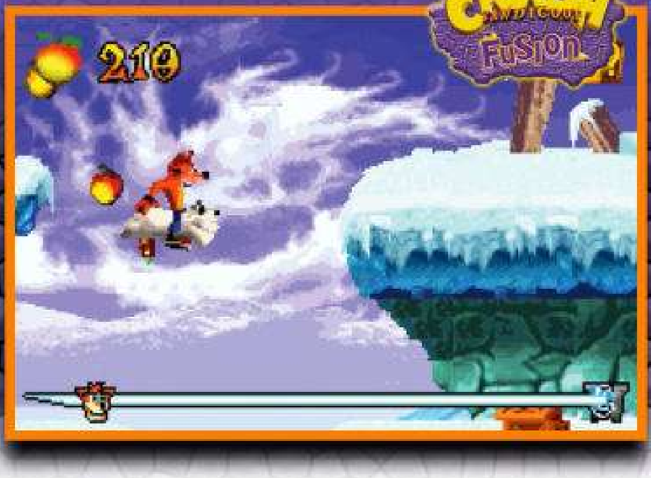
TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

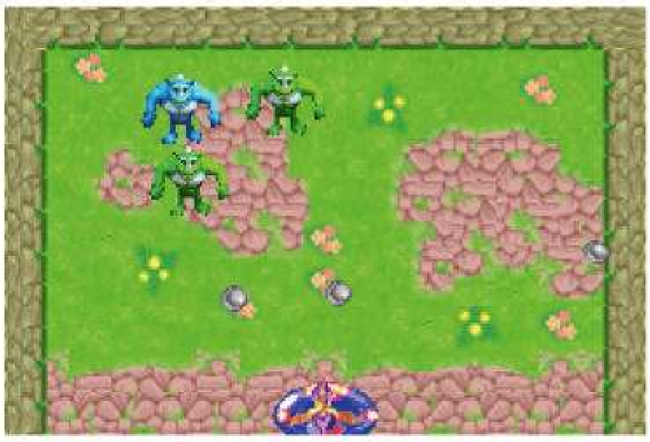
■ Both Fusion games have Crash and Spyro enter a tank to shoot up a storm. Crash's version, however, is the more valiant attempt, as players have full 360-degree control over the vehicle. Beating the minigame involves navigating ill-placed canons and collecting crates before making it to the end portal.



POLAR EXPRESS

■ After making it to the Arctic Cliffs hub world, *Crash Fusion* sees the return of Crash's trusty bear pal Polar. This time, though, hopping from platform to platform requires you to master jumping and boosting on a 2D plane. Collecting all the crates in one attempt will see you gifted a bonus gem!





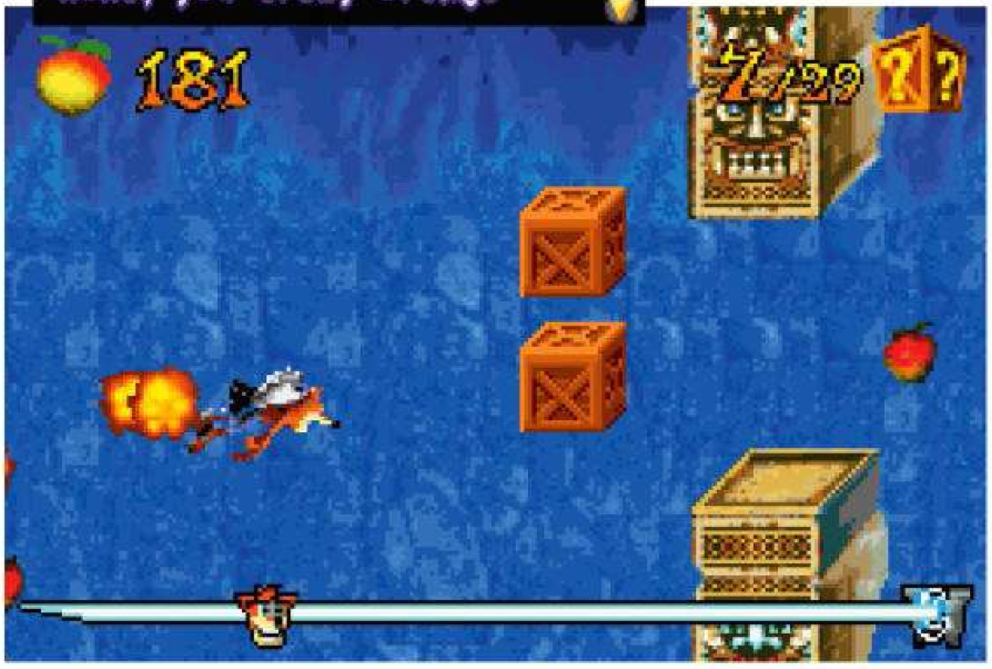
» [GBA] Vicarious Visions looked to some of the most classic arcade titles for inspiration with its minigames, such as this *Breakout* throwback.

▶ the Wumpa Fruits needed to unlock more levels while spinning and jumping to defeat enemies. "Because our characters were sprites," Jonny remembers, "we could reuse a lot of the sprite animations. On the art side, I know our artists pushed for greater fidelity in backgrounds from the previous games." Spyro eventually handled much the same as the manic marsupial outside of minigames. He was now controllable from a side view though still equipped with recognisable skills like fire breathing and his trademark air glide.

"MULTIPLAYER HAD A MUCH LARGER BARRIER TO ENTRY BACK THEN"

JONNY RUSSELL

SPYRO: Stay away from my home, you crazy orange

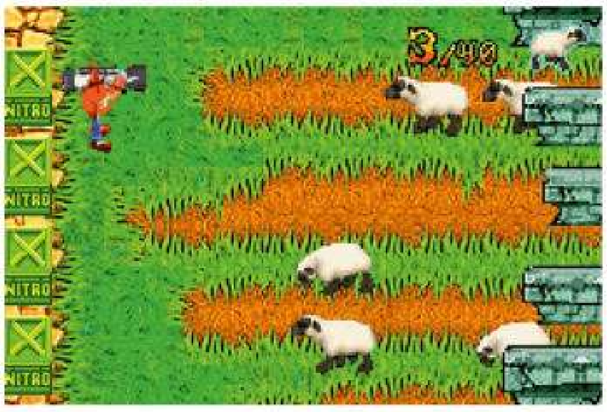


» [GBA] Jonny and his team were inspired by a web-based helicopter game for Crash's jetpack flying sequences.

The next major challenge was to make the dozens of minigames featured in *Crash Bandicoot Fusion* and *Spyro Fusion* fun and engaging. Again, Crash Bandicoot had a bit of a leg up in this department, largely because those early PlayStation games of his offered a good mix of gameplay styles. For instance, one level might see him barrelling down a track on a motorcycle, while another may task players to guide him underwater in scuba gear while avoiding bombs. Spyro The Dragon, meanwhile, needed the most retooling out of the two once more.

"On *Crash* [*Fusion*], we used previous *Crash* games to mine for ideas and tried to mash that up with *Spyro* characters to get inspiration," says Jonny. "We had a series of forced-scrolling levels where we tried to use familiar previous *Crash* elements such as polar bear riding or using a jetpack." Forced-scrolling levels, Jonny tells us, had been a particular favourite style of his since *Battletoads*. "Other minigames were based on games from *Crash Bash*, such as Ballistix, and a tank minigame that was also inspired by Atari's *Combat*. The Sheep Stampede minigames were inspired by *Tapper*, but instead of serving drinks, Crash was shooting his Fruit Bazooka at sheep."

Vicarious Visions soon realised that, as well as paying tribute to the world and characters of each eponymous mascot, the minigame collection format was also just a good excuse to celebrate wider gaming history. Contemporary players might not be aware that they were playing a warped version of *Breakout* whenever Crash or Spyro bounce metal balls back at their enemies in the likes of Blizzard Ball, but it didn't matter. Providing Crash still collected fruit and Spyro hoovered up gems while surrounded by familiar friends, everything in between just needed to be fun within a bite-sized format, as each self-contained minigame was constructed to offer short bursts of play suited to the handheld format.

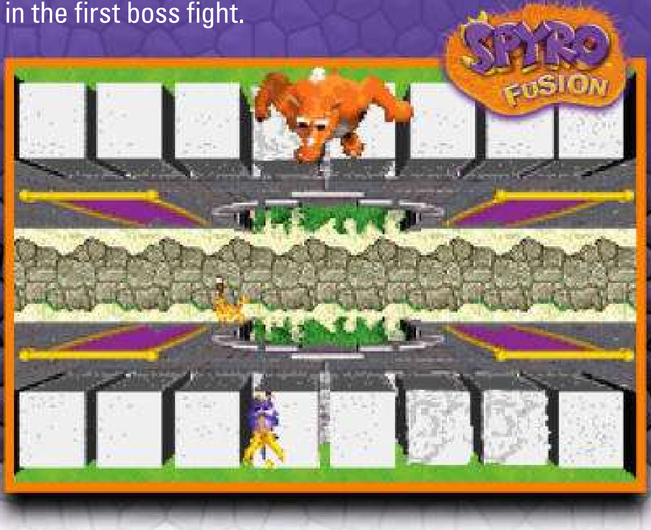


» [GBA] Never mind counting sheep, Crash has a hard time to tame them. But it's nothing a giant bazooka can't fix!

All told, outside of the initial design challenges with Spyro, it wasn't

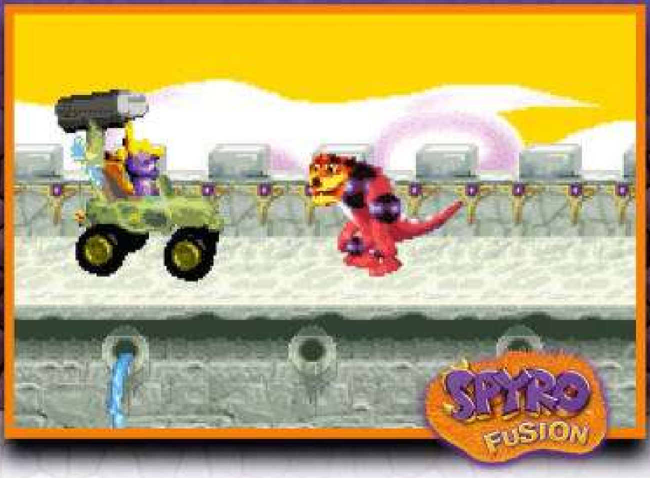
RUMBLE IN THE RAMPARTS

This type of minigame pops up more than once across both games, pitting you against an opponent at the top of your screen who you must knock off by destroying the platforms beneath them using molotovs. Initially you face a rival dragon, before defeating Crash in the first boss fight.



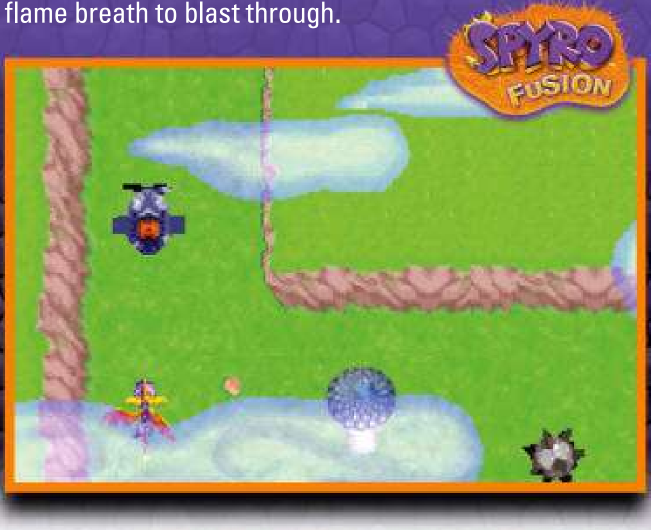
CASTLE CRUISIN'

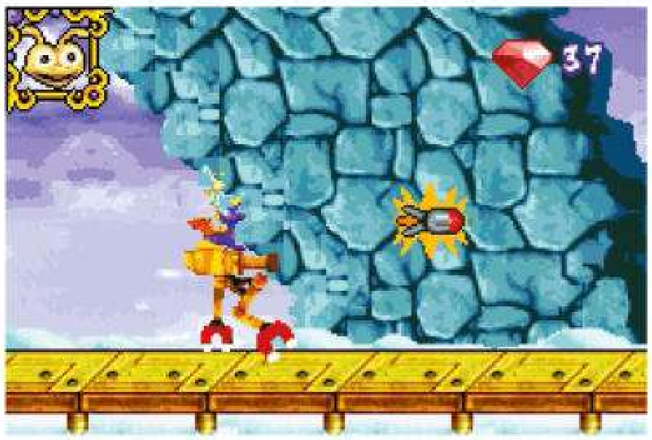
Spyro gets behind the wheels of several vehicles during this crossover journey. One of the most interesting comes early on in Castle Cruisin', where you must manoeuvre a cannon-equipped buggy through spikes, gaps and dragon foes. From knowing when to jump and fire to the constantly rolling screen, a lot is asked of you at once.



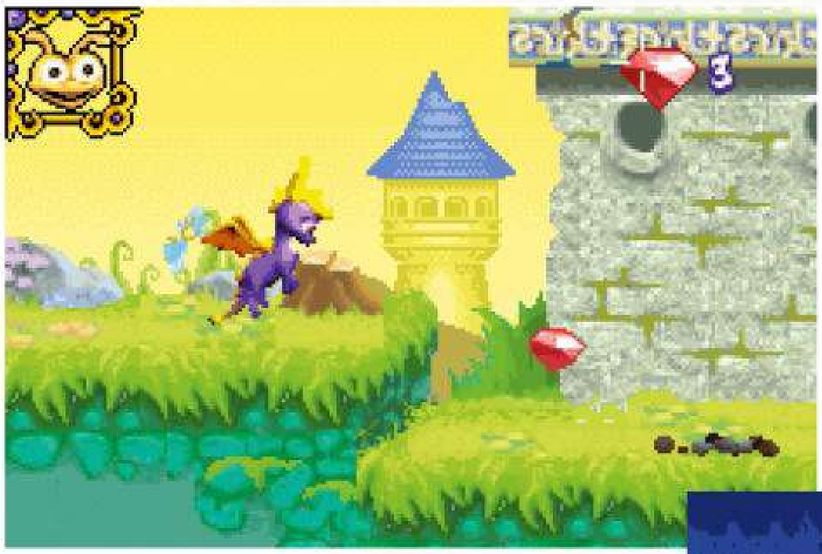
ALTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

It wouldn't be a *Spyro The Dragon* game without a fair amount of flying. Thankfully, you get to do plenty of this from a top-down view, first in a minigame called Altitude Adjustment. Reaching the end means dodging sky mines and several electrified gates, using your flame breath to blast through.





» [GBA] One of the most unique vehicles Spyro gets to drive is a magnet robot that sees him flip from the top and bottom of the screen.

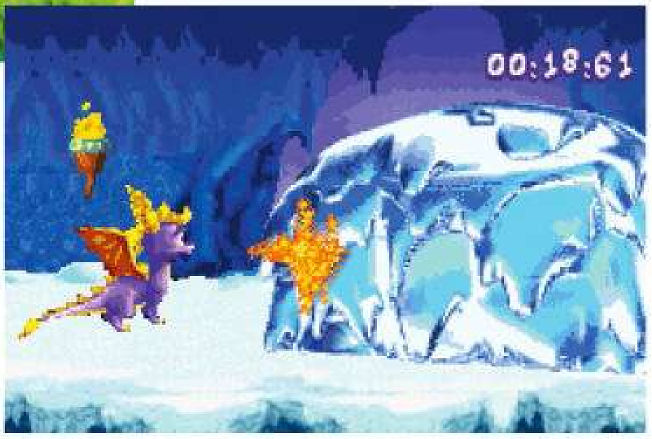


» [GBA] Before *Spyro Fusion*, the titular purple dragon had never been presented from a 2D side-scrolling perspective.

too tricky for Jonny and his team to incorporate key franchise elements into each minigame or the handful of hub worlds. "We did our best to combine familiar characters and settings from both games," he says. "In some cases, it was natural, like adding the sheep (a familiar *Spyro* element) as characters that could be fodder. Since crossovers always have a misunderstanding between the heroes, we had the cheesy idea of the enemies wearing masks of our heroes to help facilitate this miscommunication. We also used characters from each game franchise in the same way to help link the two worlds, such as Moneybags from *Spyro*, who ran a shop in both games."

Scene setting aside, publisher Vivendi knew that it needed another major hook to help inspire players to link up with friends who had got the opposite game. *Crash Fusion* and *Spyro Fusion* may have never intended to replicate the creature collection madness found in *Pokémon*, but both games did play into the idea of trading by way of including collectible cards exclusive to either game. These cards were earned either through scoring well in challenges or buying them from the in-game shop, ranging in rarity from low to high depending on the character they depicted. Players could trade back and forth with one another via the GBA link cable, which Vicarious Visions implemented to try and achieve that same 'collect them all' mentality.

Outside of each game's main story mode, also encouraging players to link up was the suite of reformatted Party Mode minigames. "For multiplayer, we based games on mechanics and modes in the minigames, such as the bridge fight and Ballistix, which had a variety of different modes and could be four players," says Jonny. He admits, though, that a lot was asked of players to set up this joint fun. "Multiplayer had a much larger barrier to entry back then, since not only did you need a friend with a GBA and two carts, you had to have a link cable in order to play. I believe we did have a stripped-down version of multiplayer where you only needed one cart though."



» [GBA] Moving from one hub world to another usually involves its own style of minigame, like flaming some ice within a time limit.

Ultimately, *Crash Bandicoot Fusion* and *Spyro Fusion* received mixed reviews upon release, with select critics noticing the slightly higher attention to detail paid towards the former – unsurprising considering that the ambitious crossover project originally started out as another *Crash Bandicoot* game. Nevertheless, it was hard to deny the thrill of seeing these two Nineties icons rub shoulders for the first, and pretty much only time in a full capacity (although both characters also have cameos in each other's games).

If nothing else, both titles proved that Vicarious Visions had the chops to adopt multiple play styles and implant them into a single game, no doubt influencing its work on the wildly successful *Skylanders* series of toys-to-life games just under a decade later. Today, Crash and Spyro now find themselves under Activision's stewardship, but does Jonny think they'll ever cross paths again? "The two characters are still around and remembered today," he says, "and I'm sure fans would welcome another crossover." ✱

AGGELOS

WHILE THE NAME AGGELOS MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR TO YOU, ITS STUNNING PIXEL ART AND BRIGHT AND CHEERFUL DESIGN SHOULD BE INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE IF YOU GREW UP PLAYING CLASSIC CONSOLE GAMES. FRANÇOIS PEREZ EXPLAINS HOW THE PAST INSPIRED HIS ENTERTAINING ACTION ADVENTURE GAME

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

With so many games being made today by huge teams, it's easy to forget there are many great releases out there that are lovingly crafted by just a handful of individuals. *Aggelos* is one such game, a delightfully constructed action adventure that's largely the work of just one person – the rather talented François Perez, who not only programmed *Aggelos* but was also behind its design, music and graphics. Although as he tells us, he can't take complete credit for his entertaining adventure. "Chris [Carson] did the porting [to consoles and Steam]" François says. " He actually did a great job with the bad material that he had to work with [laughs]."

If you couldn't have guessed by looking at the distinctive cartoony visuals, meticulously designed denizens and cute-looking characters, *Aggelos* has much in common with the *Wonder Boy* adventures that were crafted by Westone. "*Wonder Boy* is my favourite series," François confirms. "In fact, my first amateur creation was also a *Wonder Boy* fan game [*Wonder Boy The Prophecy*]. Initially, *Aggelos* was supposed to be inspired by *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link*, but it ended up being between both games." While it certainly leans on the likes of *Zelda II* and *Wonder Boy*, *Aggelos* is very much its own thing and certainly doesn't feel like a cheap copycat. Things start off traditionally enough with you rescuing a damsel in distress, but you soon discover that there is much more at stake. Said damsel is actually a missing princess and when you reach Lumen Castle its king begs you to defeat a dark evil that threatens to overpower the peaceful kingdom.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** PQUBE LTD

» **DEVELOPER:** STORYBIRD GAMES

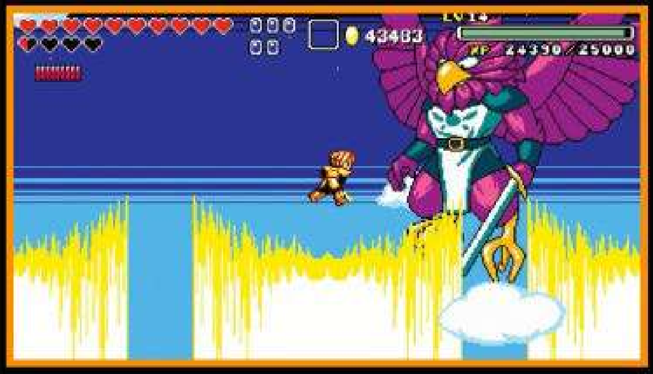
» **RELEASE:** OUT NOW

» **PLATFORM:** PC, PS4, SWITCH, XBOX ONE

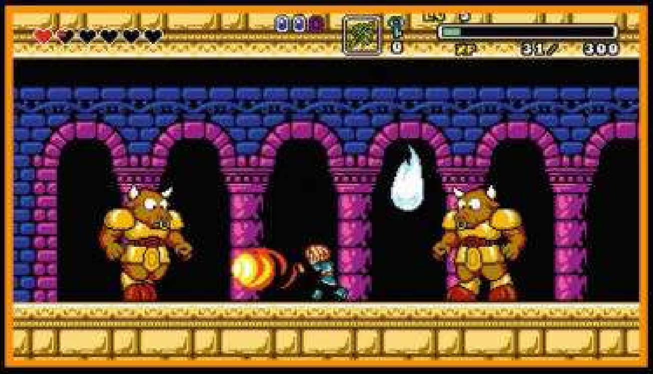
» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

It's an admittedly basic premise, but it's one that simply allows you to get on with your adventure and while most seasoned gamers will discover many of *Aggelos*' secrets within ten hours of play that doesn't diminish its enjoyment or its variety. You'll explore the dark Lumen Woods, traverse the volcanic wastes of Fira Volcano and search the watery depths of The Abyss as you seek out the hearts and relics that will give you a fighting chance in the game's dramatic finale. Like many similar games *Aggelos* is a speedrunner's dream once you know where you're going, but that first playthrough will take you a decent amount of time to complete.

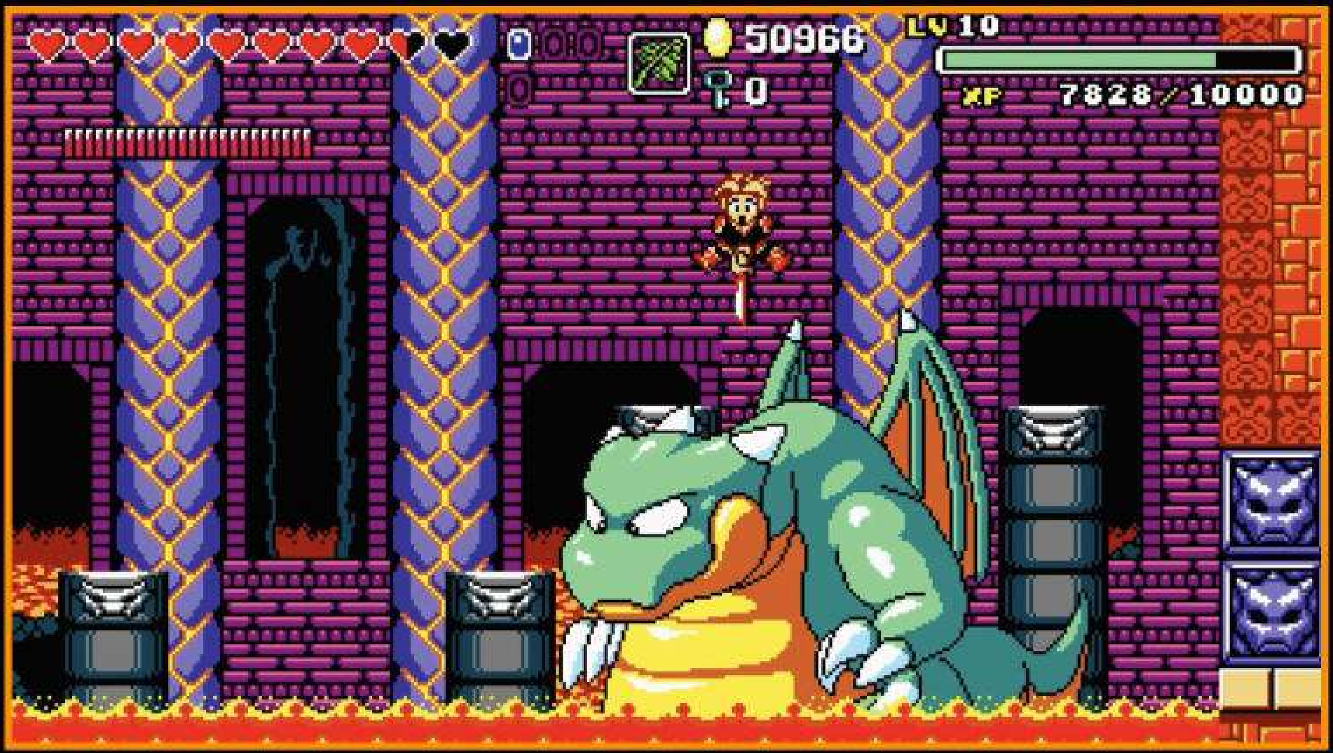
The game itself however had a relatively straightforward development period, albeit a disjointed one with François admitting that without its frequent pauses *Aggelos* was completed



» [Switch] If you complete some obtuse tasks and beat this fearsome opponent you'll receive the best sword and armour in the game.



» [Switch] There are four elemental rings found in Lumen's temples that allow your hero to deal with enemies more effectively.



» [Xbox One] Scrolls not only give you new special moves to use against bosses but will also allow you to access new areas.

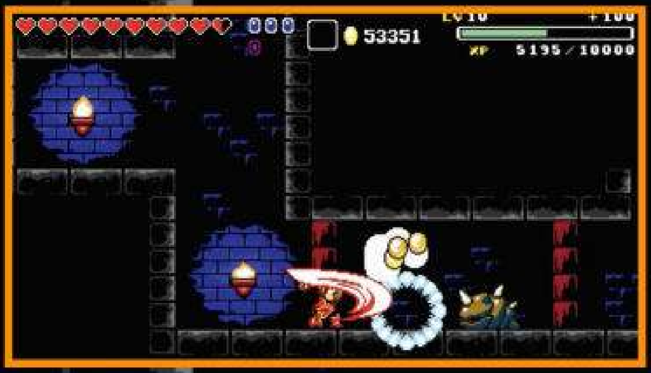
in roughly a year. Interestingly, François is surprisingly frank about his own coding abilities, explaining why Chris Carson proved crucial in getting *Aggelos* over the finishing line. "Coding was the worst," he admits. "I'm a very bad coder and the *Aggelos* code is a total mess. The button mapping was almost impossible to fix for consoles, but Chris helped me there. I am getting better with each game but I believe I won't code anymore for any of my next important projects."

François may admit to not being much of a coder, but there's no denying he's a terrifically proficient pixel artist and rather great at character and monster design. Many of the villagers and denizens you interact with look wonderful and have an instant *Wonder Boy* vibe while distinctive animation fills them with personality. While François did draw on Westone's series for inspiration he also looked at franchises like *Ys*, *Zelda* and *Mega Man*, as well as other sources. "Sometimes I would also look at different bestiaries, not necessarily a game bestiary, or longplays of games to find inspiration," he says.

As well as imaginative pixel work, *Aggelos* is also notable for its chirpy chiptunes and they're also created by François. There's a range of compositions that perfectly suit the on-screen action and they again draw heavily on the likes of *Wonder Boy* and other classic arcade adventures. "I used a NES VST with fruity loops," he explains. "I don't really ask myself what the melody will be. When I design a level the music comes into my head. Other times I hear a song and it will inspire me, then I find a place where it will fit into the game. The last boss theme is inspired by *Final Fantasy Legend 2* on the Game Boy for example."

While we're on the subject of *Aggelos*' boss fights, it's worth mentioning how challenging they are. Many initially feel quite daunting but constant play will soon reveal holes in their attacks that can be exploited. It's an area that François was quite keen to hone. "I try to not just repeat what I see in other games," he admits. "I know what I like as well. For example, I don't like when you have to wait for the boss to open his weak point." Some of *Aggelos*' boss encounters almost feel like a shoot-'em-up at times, particularly with the final boss, as the screen can be peppered with bullets, but this too is intentional. "It's hard, but fair because the player has all the information they need to ensure they theoretically never get hit," explains François. "Oh, and I pay big attention to the impact [sound] to give the player satisfaction when hitting the boss. The sound itself is inspired by *Rygar* on NES. I always found this FX so juicy!"

So as we wrap up our time with François we were keen to know why he created *Aggelos* as an action adventure like so many other independent developers. "Well Metroidvania is a style that doesn't really require big financial resources," he concludes. "You can make deep, fun games all on your own. It's easily my favourite style and I have two other Metroidvania projects in the works." ✱



» [Xbox One] This area is normally clad in darkness so you must light torches to find your way.

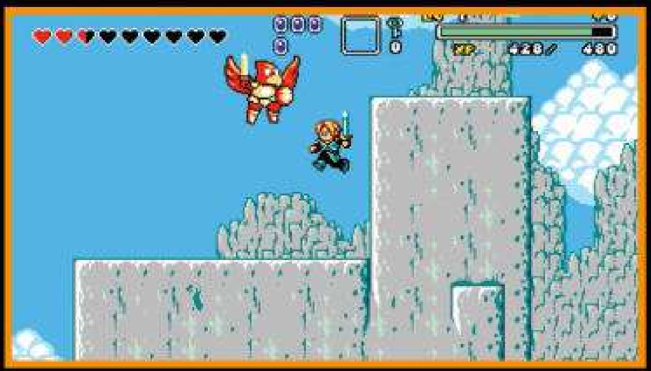
LOWERING THE CURVE

Making a game everyone can enjoy

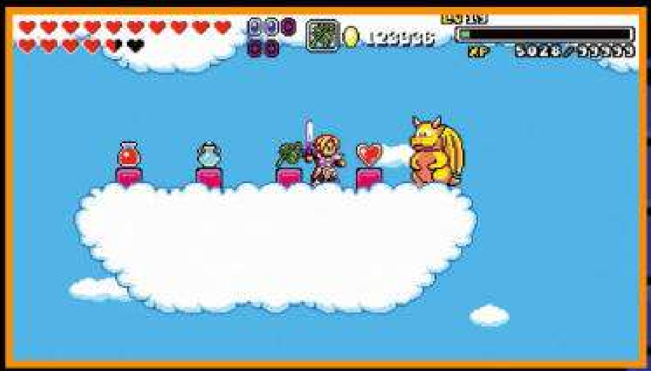
■ If there's one complaint we had with our ten-hour playthrough of *Aggelos* it's that it does suffer from the odd difficulty spike that can lead to frustration in certain areas of the game. Navigation throughout the world of Lumen is generally excellent because whenever you're unsure where to go next you can simply visit a kindly old seer who will give you very obvious clues that should hopefully jog your memory. François does admit that there were issues with *Aggelos* when he first started work on it, though. "Everything was too hard at the beginning," he says. "It's a mistake every creator makes and here it was because the enemy patterns were too obvious to us."

Needless to say François has been doing plenty to ensure that gamers can still get through his adventure with a little bit of practice. "We have been testing the game from start to finish hundreds of times," he admits. "The hard part is to make the game finishable for low-skilled players but still fun and not too easy for strong players. We've also included a hard mode for the most determined players."

One aspect of *Aggelos* that some will find a sticking point however is the bosses that reside in the temples you'll visit during your quest. While there are liberal save points throughout *Aggelos* they're not always near bosses, which can make reaching them at high health quite difficult. As frustrating as this can be, it's quite intentional. "Sorry about boss retries, but I'm old school on this," laughs François. "I like games where there is a penalty for loss, otherwise there is no tension. The player must learn to play well, so the satisfaction of beating a hard boss is even stronger. I really liked this no pity approach in *Hollow Knight*, for example."



» [Switch] You can increase the amount of hearts you have by either defeating bosses, completing various tasks for villagers or simply finding them in chests.



» [Switch] Some hearts are not only well-hidden, but will also have to be purchased.

CHIPTUNE CONCERTO

CHIPTUNE REMAINS A DISTINCTIVE PART OF MODERN MUSIC, BOTH IN THE GAMING COMMUNITY THAT POPULARISED IT AND IN WIDER CULTURE. WE SPEAK TO MODERN COMPOSERS TO FIND OUT HOW THEY CREATE CHIPTUNE AND HOW THE MEDIUM IS EVOLVING

WORDS BY NIALL O'DONOGHUE

There's something wonderfully transportive about chiptune. No matter the context, hearing a few bars of a square wave melody instantly brings you to a better time and place, evoking images of countless hours spent in front of classic consoles. Think of the *Super Mario Bros* theme; with just a few repeating melody lines and minimalistic percussion, Koji Kondo created something truly timeless. "I wanted to create something that had never been heard before, where you'd think, 'This isn't like game music at all, isn't it?,'" Kondo said about his soundtrack in a 2007 Wired interview. "It had to fit the game the best, enhance the gameplay and make it more enjoyable. Not just sit there and be something that plays while you play the game."

However, its history can be traced back decades earlier. Broadly defined as making music using sounds generated by retro computer sound chips, composer and enterprise fellow at The University Of Melbourne Kenneth B McAlpine traces chiptune's origins back to the Fifties, when researchers used computers like the TX-0 and PDP-1 to make music. "The music of the PDP-1 was raspy and coarse, but it was a new and compelling voice," Kenneth writes in his book *Bits And Pieces: A History Of Chiptunes*. "Although it would be a few more years before this voice echoed in the virtual space of videogames, it hinted at how those games might sound."

> "I'VE TRAVELLED WITH BANDS AND IT'S COMPLICATED, HARD AND EXPENSIVE: TRAVELLING WITH GAME BOYS IS NOT"
> **DAN BEHRENS**

In the intervening decades, chiptune has endured as a cultural force. Kenneth credits sequencers like Little Sound DJ (LSDJ) and Nanoloop with helping to bring about a modern wave of chiptune musicians in the Nineties, alongside the incorporation of virtualised recording studio hardware into desktop sequencers. "Chipmusic was reborn with a new, harder sound, less influenced by videogaming than by other contemporary musical sounds: dubstep, house, glitch and reggae," Kenneth says.

Chiptune soundtracks have also risen in popularity in tandem with the wave of retro-inspired independent videogames in the Tens, as well as existing as a distinct musical voice utilised in non-gaming contexts by musical acts like rock band Anamanaguchi (who did, admittedly, compose the soundtrack for cult classic 2010 beat-'em-up *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World: The Game*). Festivals like Square Sounds bring together varied artists under a shared chiptune banner, incorporating everything from "trashy pop" to "full hard dance music" and "progressive SEGA soundtrack-type stuff," organiser Alex Yabsley said in an interview with Sifter in February 2020. "It doesn't sound like your soundtrack to your videogame, it sounds like dance music," fellow organiser Kristy Dossor added. "If people were a little bit more open-minded, you would be hearing it on the radio."

Dan Behrens first encountered modern chiptune musicians in 2009, via buskers performing using a Game Boy outside Penny Arcade Expo in Seattle, their amplifier hot-wired to a car battery. "I found out that people were making new music and playing live shows with real hardware," he recalls. "It was really raw and punk rock. They were writing music that was way different than the way Japanese composers were doing it in the Eighties and Nineties. The new stuff that people were making was much more influenced by glitchy, modern electronic music."

Composing and performing as 'Danimal Cannon', with soundtrack credits on games like *RetroMania Wrestling* and *Just Shapes & Beats*, he first dove into the inner-workings of chipmusic in the mid-Noughties, dissecting NES soundtracks via the Winamp plug-in NotSo Fatso to create arrangements for his VGM cover bands like Armcannon. "I really fell in love with the quirkiness of the way that these tracks were arranged," he says. "I would almost describe them as being hyper-melodic: melodies on melodies on melodies. And no chords, because you can't really do a chord on a NES without using up all of your sound channels."

Dan uses trackers to compose chiptune in Game Boy emulator BGB, a process he finds "lends itself to adding tons of expressive detail very quickly". ▶

» Eric 'Rainbowdragoneyes' W Brown comes from a musical family, learning trumpet and piano as a kid before focusing on drums.

© Infected Monkey

» Eric's stage persona lets him cut loose, saying "Rainbowdragoneyes could get away with being kind-of an asshole, a little bit abrasive."

» Enrique 'Pentadrangle' Martin has played piano since childhood, alongside experimenting with MIDI software Cakewalk in his early teens.

» Dan has painful memories of forgetting to change out batteries before gigs. "I've literally had one of my bandmates die in the middle of a song," he laughs.

» Dan 'Danimal Cannon' Behrens grew up as a "heavy metal kid who was also a big gamer", both of which would prove useful for his musical career.

» [PC] Games like *Celeste* don't just look retro, they sound retro too thanks to beautifully constructed chiptune soundtracks.

ESSENTIAL CHIPTUNES

FIVE OF THE BEST CLASSIC GAMING TRACKS

MARIO 001700
×03
WORLD 1-1
TIME 375

WORLD 1-1

SUPER MARIO BROS
FAMICOM • 1983

■ Koji Kondo's wonderfully catchy tune accompanies perhaps the most famous level in videogame history, it's harmonised melody in counterpoint to a bouncy bassline. Shigeru Miyamoto's platformer may have revolutionised level design, but Kondo's theme set the bar for an entire generation.

SCORE-007000 TIME 0103 STAGE 03
PLAYER
ENEMY
P-03

VAMPIRE KILLER

CASTLEVANIA
NES • 1987

■ Composer Kinuyo Yamashita focused on the platformer's gothic imagery for this legendary soundtrack. "The scenario, gameplay, characters and everything else were so good and the score fitted in nicely," she said in a 2010 interview with Square Enix Music Online.

MEGA MAN
II
NORMAL
DIFFICULT
PRESS START

DR WILY'S CASTLE

MEGA MAN 2
NES • 1988

■ Arguably one of the most exciting songs in the entire NES catalogue, this fast-paced track impressed director Akira Kitamura so much that he requested composer Takashi Tateishi to make "more songs just like that", according to a 2015 Brave Wave interview. Thank goodness for that.

OPENING THEME

FINAL FANTASY
NES • 1987

■ The *Final Fantasy* series has sprawled into a gigantic franchise branching across decades, a far cry from its humble NES origins, but Nobuo Uematsu's work remains its beating heart. This triumphant theme is a rousing reminder of just why that is the case, a true ode to adventure.

SCORE 27410
TIME 1:03
RINGS 26

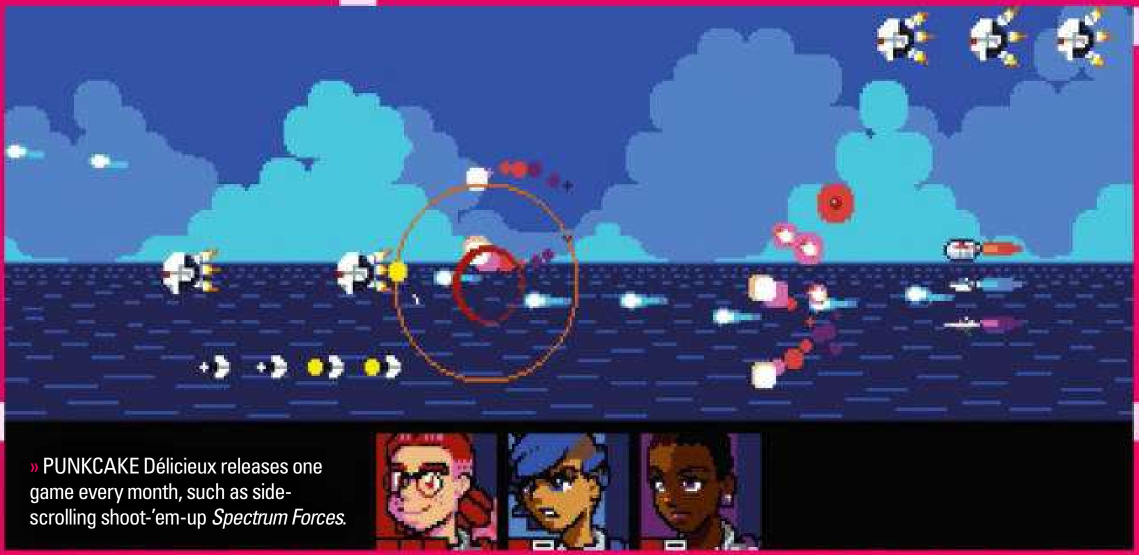
GREEN HILL ZONE

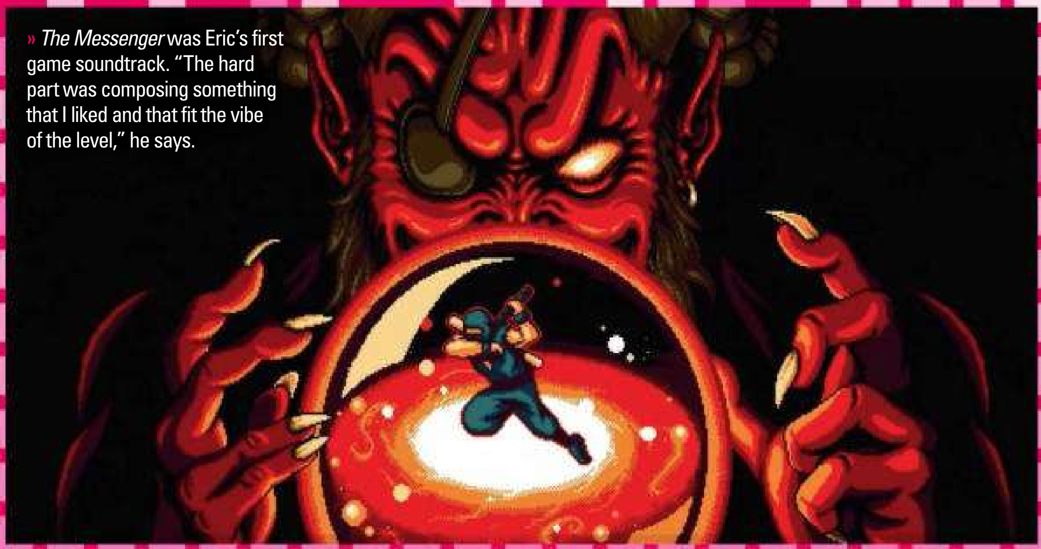
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
MEGA DRIVE • 1991

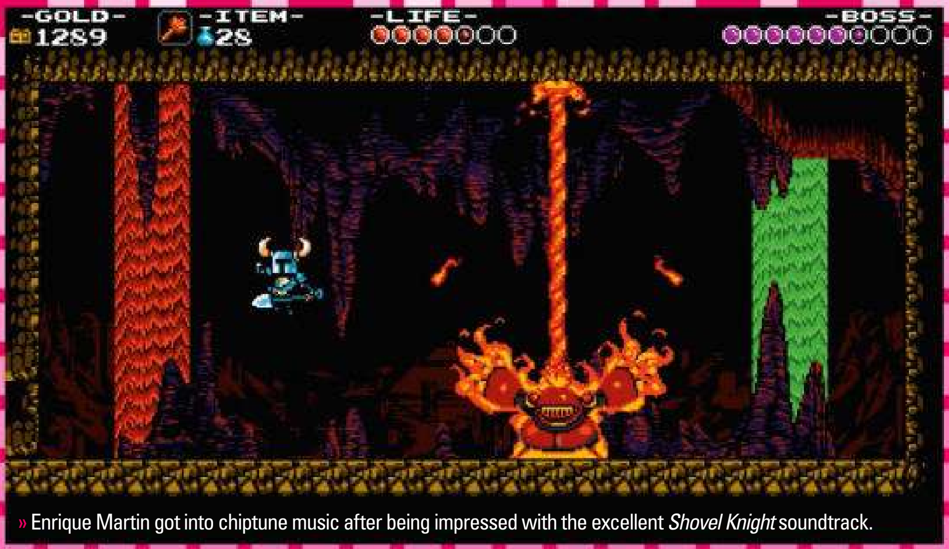
■ Composer Masato Nakamura coaxed a gorgeous, utterly joyful track out of the Sega Mega Drive sound chip, perfectly accompanying the hyper-colourful scenery. With covers such as a funk version by insaneintherainmusic this song has truly proven itself to be evergreen.

» Dan practises his song transitions just as much as his technique, tweaking laptop settings while altering Game Boy files and tuning. All while keeping a crowd engaged.

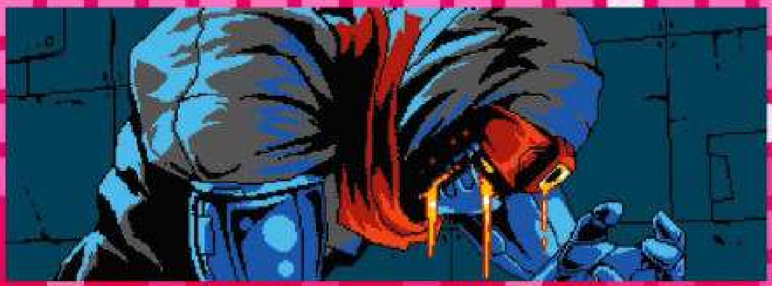
©Chiptography

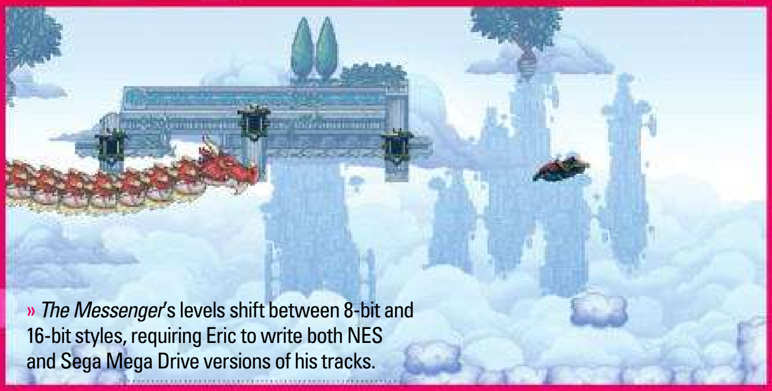

» PUNKCAKE Délicieux releases one game every month, such as side-scrolling shoot-'em-up *Spectrum Forces*.

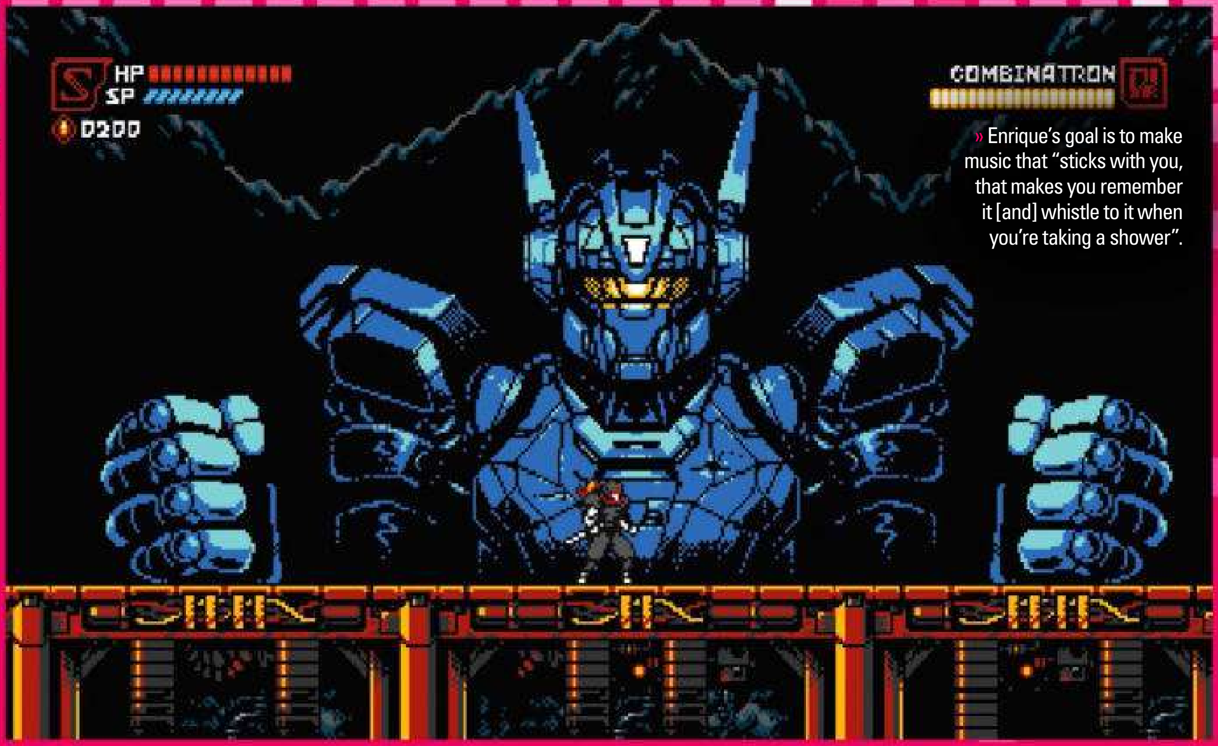

» *The Messenger* was Eric's first game soundtrack. "The hard part was composing something that I liked and that fit the vibe of the level," he says.



» Enrique Martin got into chiptune music after being impressed with the excellent *Shovel Knight* soundtrack.


» Jake Kaufman was originally going to produce *Cyber Shadow*'s soundtrack, but was impressed enough by Enrique's music that his involvement was limited to the game's trailer.


» *The Messenger*'s levels shift between 8-bit and 16-bit styles, requiring Eric to write both NES and Sega Mega Drive versions of his tracks.



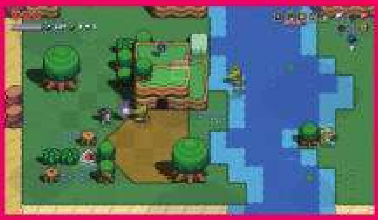
» Enrique's goal is to make music that "sticks with you, that makes you remember it [and] whistle to it when you're taking a shower".

CHIPTUNE MAESTROS

MODERN MUSICIANS PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF CHIPTUNE

ANAMANAGUCHI

■ Founded in 2004, this long-running band mixes pop and rock with chiptune, creating uplifting and high-intensity music. Alongside their originals, the band also created the soundtrack for *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World: The Game*, while retro gaming aesthetics are peppered throughout their imagery.



CHIPZEL

■ Niamh Houston is one of the most well-known members of the chipmusic scene, coming to prominence after scoring rhythm game *Super Hexagon*. Instantly recognisable for her energetic and uptempo compositions, her work can also be heard in games like *River City Girls* and *Cadence of Hyrule*.

DISASTERPEACE

■ Perhaps best known for his work on indie darlings *Fez* and *Hyper Light Drifter*, Rich Vreeland's chiptune magnum opus is arguably the concept album *Rise Of The Obsidian Interstellar*, which blends progressive rock and electronic music elements into an instrumental odyssey.

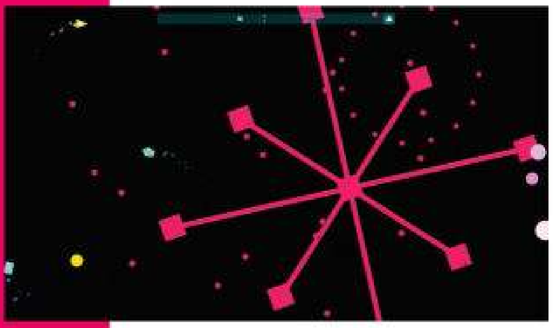
JAKE KAUFMAN

■ Jake's recent work on *Shovel Knight* brought with it deserved acclaim, but the veteran composer's track record stretches back to the early Noughties, including soundtracks for classic series like *Shantae*, *Contra* and *Double Dragon*. He's even done music for some movies.

LENA RAINE

■ Lena Raine's music encompasses a broad range of sounds and styles, both for her soundtrack work on titles like *Minecraft* and her solo music. However, both with her *Chip Collection* and soundtrack for *Celeste*, Lena incorporates retro elements into forward-thinking music to thrilling results.

» Dirtywave's portable tracker and synthesiser M8 is an example of modern chiptune-compatible hardware, taking inspiration from LSDJ.



» Dan takes inspirations from experimental NES composers like Tim Follin, singling out his *Pictionary* soundtrack in particular.

» The action of *Just Shapes & Beats* syncs up to the music, an intense audio-visual experience in the vein of *Super Hexagon*.

"I will borrow a lot of things from the way I interact with my traditional instrument, the guitar, and apply them," he says, jokingly noting that a standard square wave "sounds like a microwave going off". Take the iconic sound of a string bend. To represent this, Dan takes two notes placed around one-sixteenth of a bar apart and uses a command to create a 'portamento' pitch-sliding effect, the speed of which is determined by an adjustable hexadecimal value.

"It's those little expressions that will make even the simplest sound, like a square wave, come alive," he elaborates, saying that text-based trackers allow him to experiment and implement ideas quicker than modern audio production software. "Chiptune software, just in the very nature of the way that trackers work, just lend themselves to this hyper-detailed music – that was something that I was very drawn to."

Live chiptune performances often showcase artists DJing on a stage. Visualists also play an integral role, sharing the stage to produce kaleidoscopic imagery generated using retro or retro-inspired hardware. However, Dan takes the stage with an electric guitar, playing blistering leads to staccato backing tracks. "I've travelled with bands and it's complicated, hard and expensive: travelling with Game Boys is not," Dan says. "It's allowed me a lot of opportunities to go across the entire world that would have been, probably, financially impossible to do if I had a full band with me."

> "BLENDING THOSE SOUNDS ALLOWS YOU TO EVOKE RETRO GAMES IN A MODERN WAY"
> **ENRIQUE MARTIN**

Dan is far from the only chiptune performer adding variety to their live shows, however. Eric W Brown takes the stage as "legendary chiptune warlock" Rainbowdragoneyes, wearing black metal-inspired 'corpse paint' makeup while singing and screaming along to a Game Boy backing track. "I wanted the delivery of a metal performance, but with this very obviously upbeat and melodic chiptune music," he tells us. A veteran drummer for metal bands like Nekrogoblicon, Eric is best-known in gaming circles for his work on Sabotage Studio's 2018 debut *The Messenger*, composing both 8-bit and 16-bit versions of every song for the time-travelling platformer. However, he traces his chiptune roots back to the mid-Noughties, when he discovered composers like Bit Shifter via Myspace.

"I sent him a message just asking him how he did this, not really thinking anything of it, and maybe a day or two later he responded with a page and a half just explaining the whole thing," Eric recalls. "Falling into the rabbit hole of figuring out how it all works, that was really exciting to me, how people use the limitations of the medium to make really amazing music." Eric produced his first album using LSDJ, blending eurobeat and death metal using just his vocals and four sound channels, and says much of the appeal of composing chiptune goes back to the old adage: limitation breeds creativity. "You're trying to make the most epic banger ever with just those four channels, whereas you'd use a laptop with Ableton or Logic and, essentially, the possibilities are endless," he says. "You have to start with one channel and then build from there. You've got a ceiling as far as the amount of polyphony you can have in a song and just how far you can stretch that." However, this 'purist' mentality has lessened in Eric over the years, particularly as his own production techniques have developed. Modern music software allows composers to leave hardware restrictions behind to create layered, multifaceted compositions that maintain the tone and aesthetic of chiptune. Indeed, *The Messenger*'s soundtrack was created using both Famitracker and DefleMask to emulate the sound chips of a NES and Sega Mega Drive respectively, with mastering done in the DAW Logic. "You're free to call it chiptune if it's made with those [hardware] limitations in mind, it doesn't matter how you did it," he says. "In layman's terms, it's 8-bit music and then that's fine."

For example, take Lena Raine's renowned soundtrack for 2018 indie platformer *Celeste*. While Lena does have a back-catalogue of 'pure' chiptune compositions, she explains that her soundtrack goes far beyond just chiptune in a 2018 Medium blog. Lena used synthesisers, layering heaps of effects like reverb and noise filtering onto base sounds generated by oscillators. This process, rather than the "pure, clean sound" of less heavily effected chiptune music, is what Lena describes as "the main distinction between calling something chiptune music, and identifying it as using electronic instruments in some way that may or may not originate from chips".

Enrique 'Pentadrangle' Martin, composer on *Cyber Shadow* and resident musician with game studio PUNKCAKE Délicieux, describes the work of composers like Lena Raine and Chipzel paradoxically, "Definitely chiptune but not chiptune." Enrique started playing in bands in his late teens, like heavy metal band In.Verno, and was inspired to write chiptune after hearing Jake Kaurman's *Shovel Knight* soundtrack for the first time during a 2015 scuba diving trip. "When I saw, in a modern [context], what chiptune music could sound like when done properly with modern resources, I told myself, 'I could do something like this – definitely not as good as what this guy does, because he is the chiptune God, but I could do something similar to this,'" he recalls.

Enrique started off using a Game Boy as a drum machine for live performances around this time, but uses plug-ins with the DAW Reaper to compose soundtracks like *Cyber Shadow*. As a composer, Enrique finds it highly rewarding to be free from the necessities of collaborating with bandmates. "When I had a song, I needed to negotiate with the rest of the members of the band to change that part or that order," he says. "When I started composing music just for myself, it was super rewarding: everything that I did was mine." For him, mixing retro chiptune sounds with modern instrumentation allows for a much richer approach to composition. "Blending those sounds allows you to evoke retro games in a modern way," he explains. "I want to sound like those chips, but I don't want to be limited by their restrictions."

As a medium, chiptune continues to evolve and branch out further from its gaming roots. However, even four decades on, there's something about chiptune that remains indelibly linked to the work of composers like Kondo, Manami Matsumae or Kinuyo Yamashita, what Eric describes as an "instant nostalgia". He concludes, "It's that sound and those square waves that are just bringing you back to better times." ✱

SONY
PLAYSTATION 3

PlayStation 3 fact

■ If you want one of the early models with PS2 compatibility, you should expect to pay a hefty premium – in working condition, you're looking at £70+ unboxed and £90+ boxed.

PROCESSOR: STI CELL 64-BIT CPU (3.2 GHZ)

MEMORY: 256 MB XDR DRAM MAIN, 256MB GDDR3 RAM VIDEO

GRAPHICS: SONY/NVIDIA RSX REALITY SYNTHESIZER (500 MHZ)

MEDIA: BLU-RAY DISC, DVD, CD-ROM

STORAGE: USER REPLACEABLE HARD DISK (20GB – 160GB DEPENDING ON MODEL)

OPERATING SYSTEM: CUSTOM PS3 SYSTEM SOFTWARE (OPTIONAL 'OTHEROS' INSTALLATIONS POSSIBLE PRIOR TO SYSTEM SOFTWARE 3.21)

PlayStation 3

» MANUFACTURER: Sony **» YEAR:** 2006
» COST: £425 (launch), £40+ (today, boxed), £20+ (today, unboxed)

Sony's third home console was a formidable piece of hardware, with its custom Cell CPU and Reality Synthesizer GPU that could deliver amazing gaming performance, if developers could master it. But there was plenty more underneath its bulky black shell, which was frequently compared to a George Foreman grill. The system was a multimedia beast, with a bank of flash memory card slots and support for optical media including Blu-Ray, DVD and even Super Audio CD. The console also included a hard disk and wireless internet capabilities as standard, and even a chip containing the PS2's Emotion Engine and Graphics Synthesizer for backwards compatibility.

Sony seemed to be trying to invent a console that could do everything, but the result was a bulky, expensive piece of hardware. Cost-cutting measures began almost immediately, with the PAL consoles using partially software-based PS2 emulation, rather than the hardware-based PS2 compatibility of NTSC models. By the time the system was a year old, it had lost all PS2 compatibility, Super Audio CD playback, the memory card readers and two USB ports. This model would cease production following the introduction of the redesigned 'slim' console in 2009. Today, these original units are considered to be rather unreliable. *

HDMI OUT
LAN
DIGITAL OUT (OPTICAL)
AV MULTI OUT
AC IN
MAIN POWER

Image by Evan Amos

SONY
SELECT
START

Image by Evan Amos

ESSENTIAL GAME

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

This probably feels like it was released a lot more recently than it actually was, and with good reason – it set the template that many modern action adventures still follow, most notably influencing the *Tomb Raider* series. Naughty Dog is a developer that understands how to blend cinematic elements into videogames to near perfection, and this was really the first time it nailed it. Nathan Drake is a likeable protagonist in the game's high-quality cutscenes, and the perfect action hero during the crazy set pieces, which range from the opening escape from a derailed train to being chased by a persistent attack helicopter.

In the chair with...

JAMES ROLFE

The creator and star of the Angry Video Game Nerd comedy series looks back at his 200 episodes of creative obscenities, raw reviews and raised middle fingers that he's lobbed at some of the worst games of all time

Words by Danny Gallagher

YouTube is full of vitriolic videogame critics trying to be comics but James Rolfe is one of the few who's actually funny. The Angry Video Game Nerd (AVGN) has played and cursed at some of the most tedious, boring and poorly made videogames in the history of the industry since 2006. James started filming reviews of unplayable dreck like *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* on the NES as the angry critic just for friends but they urged him to make more and post them on the web. Fifteen years later, Rolfe and his Cinemassacre studio have produced a feature-length film about the character, two retro-style side-scrollers and his 200th episode in which he attempts to play every game made by the notoriously bad, third-party, Nintendo-based publisher LJN.

» The Angry Video Game Nerd is fully equipped to take on gaming's worst titles.

Photos Credit John Depasquale photography

What's it like making your 200th episode? We assume it's a mix of pride and hard work or is one feeling bigger than the other right now?
It's been extremely time consuming since I'm trying to cover every LJN published game (67 to the best of my research). About roughly one-third of them I already reviewed in past episodes of the show, so I've incorporated the milestone episode trope of using flashbacks. But still with the massive amount of new reviews, it's been a lot to write. I try to keep it light and funny with keeping each review brief and humorous with the Nerd being as cynical as always. There's also a little story thread in there too about the Nerd realising it's actually harder to make games than he thinks it is. I think it's an appropriate 'season finale', especially since LJN has sort of been the Nerd's arch nemesis. This year, many fans have told me they're looking forward to seeing what I have in mind for episode 200, so I knew that it had to be something special.

What is it about the series that's helped it last so long even through the rise and fall of websites that hosted the show like ScrewAttack and GameTrailers and YouTube's constantly changing algorithms?
I don't know. Fifteen years later, the entertainer in me says to keep going because fans keep expressing how it has brightened their days and kept them going too. YouTube has definitely changed a lot over the years. Screenwave (the media company that currently handles and distributes Cinemassacre's videos) has been handling the YouTube/business side of things for as long as I can remember now, probably ten years or so. That way, I don't have to handle much bullshit. I just focus on the creative side. So I don't know how it has lasted so long. I just keep doing what I do.

How much of your time creating films and videos is dedicated to the *AVGN* series and what contributes to that percentage?

» The Nerd doesn't realise that Jason Voorhees from the *Friday The 13th* series is about to eviscerate him in his practically unplayable 1988 NES game based on the horror movie.

AVGN has been the majority of my time making videos for years. That's the most popular thing I do, and it's what pays the bills and supports my children but I always make some room for personal creative projects. Last year, I made a short horror film *The Head Returns*, and this year I made some fun music videos for Rex Viper. That's the artist side of me. It's the need to express yourself.

What is it that drives you to keep making videos featuring the character reviewing these awful, classic games? How do you keep it interesting for yourself?
Well, it's my day job, but I change up the format to keep it interesting. Some episodes are like history lessons 'edutainment' (*SwordQuest*). Others are more action-based (*Bugs Bunny's Crazy Castle*, the Sega Activator motion controller), or story-based and cinematic (*Polybius*, *Vegas Stakes*), or nostalgic and sentimental (*Earthbound*, *Majora's Mask*), or funny guest stars/co-op experiences (*Home Alone*, *Toxic Crusaders*), or a laugh out loud review of a purely ridiculous game (*Big Rigs*, *Hong Kong 97*). Also, there's a console compilation (Atari Jaguar, Commodore 64) or sticking to basics (*Super*

> The entertainer in me says to keep going because fans keep expressing how it has brightened their days and kept them going too
>
> James Rolfe

» James Rolfe, the creator and star of the *Angry Video Game Nerd* series, in his basement with his impressive collection of classic console games and accessories.

Credit: John Depasquale photography

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST** [GAME RELEASE 1987, AVGN VIDEO RELEASE 2004] NES
- **DR JEKYLL & MR HYDE** [1988, 2004] NES
- **FRIDAY THE 13TH** [1989, 2006] NES
- **POWER GLOVE ACCESSORY** [1989, 2006] NES
- **ATARI 5200 CONSOLE** [1982, 2007] ATARI
- **BUGS BUNNY'S BIRTHDAY BLOWOUT** [1990, 2007] NES
- **TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE** [1983, 2007] ATARI 2600
- **SUPERMAN 64** [1999, 2008] NINTENDO 64
- **HOTEL MARIO** [1994, 2008] PHILIPS CD-I
- **ATARI JAGUAR CONSOLE** [1993, 2009] ATARI
- **PLUMBERS DON'T WEAR TIES** [1993, 2009] 3DO
- **BUGS BUNNY'S CRAZY CASTLE** [1989, 2009] NES, VARIOUS
- **SWORDQUEST** [1982, 2010] ATARI 2600
- **ACTION 52** [1991, 2010] NES, GENESIS
- **CHEETAHMEN** [1991, 2010] NES
- **ROB THE ROBOT ACCESSORY** [1985, 2011] NES
- **NINTENDO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CARTRIDGE** [1990, 2011] NES
- **GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS** [1985, 2012] NES, VARIOUS
- **TOXIC CRUSADERS** [1992, 2013] NES, GAME BOY, GENESIS
- **ALIEN 3** [1992, 2013] SNES, GENESIS
- **BIG RIGS: OVER THE ROAD RACING** [2003, 2014] WINDOWS
- **ET: THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL** [1982, 2014] ATARI 2600
- **CRAZYBUS** [2004, 2014] GENESIS
- **MARY-KATE AND ASHLEY "GET A CLUE"** [2000, 2014] GAME BOY COLOR
- **SECRET SCOUT** [1991, 2014] NES
- **DARKWING DUCK** [1992, 2015] TURBOGRAFX-16
- **MORTAL KOMBAT MYTHOLOGIES: SUB-ZERO** [1997, 2015] DREAMCAST
- **SEGA ACTIVATOR ACCESSORY** [1993, 2016] SEGA MEGA DRIVE
- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG** [2006, 2017] XBOX 360
- **STAR WARS: MASTERS OF TERAS KASI** [1997, 2017] PLAYSTATION
- **EARTHBOUND** [1994, 2018] SNES
- **DRAKE OF THE 99 DRAGONS** [2018, 2018] XBOX, WINDOWS
- **HOME ALONE** [1991, 2018] NES, VARIOUS
- **PEPSIMAN** [1999, 2019] PLAYSTATION
- **JURASSIC PARK: TRESPASSER** [1998, 2019] WINDOWS
- **RAID 2020** [1989, 2020] NES
- **ECCO THE DOLPHIN** [1992, 2020] GENESIS, VARIOUS
- **CORPSE KILLER** [1994, 2021] SEGA CD
- **PANASONIC 3DO CONSOLE** [1993, 2021]
- **THE ROCKETEER** [1991, 2021] NES, SNES, DOS

» The Nerd reviews the ultra-rare and ultra-bad western adventure game *The Town With No Name*.

» Rolling Rock beer is the Nerd's alcoholic libation of choice and in his review of *Ecco The Dolphin* for the Sega Genesis, he tries to drown himself in the stuff to avoid having to play it.

Pitfall, *Lester The Unlikely*). So as long as I keep changing it up, I feel like it's fresh.

What is it about the Angry Video Game Nerd that fans find so appealing and keeps his and your fanbase so strong?
It's probably a bunch of different things. Some say they like the character when he feels more down to earth and is relatable, talking about an honest memory of a game from my childhood. But the character is also entertaining when he's flipping out, acting like a jerk or going completely off the rails. There's some cartoon and slapstick elements, jokes and laughs, but also some genuine information or interesting things to say about the games. I don't know. It's a bunch of things. I hear from fans about their favourite moments and episodes, and they all vary.

Does writing and performing as the Angry Video Game Nerd give you enough of a drive to keep it going or is there something else that's driving you?
Writing and performing are both therapeutic. It's not a bad job when you get to complain about games for a living. It's almost like writing an article, except you have to act it out. So often, when writing, I read it out loud and retype my sentences over and over till it sounds natural to speak. When I'm writing, I'm thinking about the tone, which parts am I yelling, which parts am I calmer. I don't know what's driving me exactly, but it's the knowledge that people will watch it and trying to make it the best possible.

Is there a type of game that the Angry Video Game Nerd can't review or would be harder to make entertaining or is that part of the challenge?
It's always surprising. I never thought there'd be much to say about *Plumbers Don't Wear Ties* and *Big Rigs*. But there always turns out to be something to say. Especially with sports games, I figured I'd need to have more knowledge in sports, but instead I played my lack of knowledge to my advantage. Maybe it's funnier sometimes when the Nerd doesn't have a clue. Maybe he doesn't always have to be an expert.

Do you ever hear from the people who worked on the games you're reviewing? Are they complimentary or have some gotten mad?
Surprisingly, not many responses. None have ever been mad. So many different people work on the games, that the blame doesn't usually fall on any individual. We've had a few guests in the videos, like

» James' basement houses an impressive collection of classic game cartridges, consoles and accessories that he's amassed over the last 15 years.

» James became every member of the Addams family for his review of the NES top-down shooter *Fester's Quest*.

» James took the infamous urban legend of the *Polybius* arcade game and turned it into a found footage horror story drawing inspiration from his deep love for the genre.

> “I have a Bachelor Of Fine Arts degree but doing this YouTube series has opened more doors for me”
>
> James Rolfe

[former Atari game designer] Howard Scott Warshaw in the *AVGN* movie from *ET*, and [DreamWorks Interactive executive producer] Seamus Blackley from *Jurassic Park: Trespasser*.

Making the movie must’ve been another huge plateau for you and the character. What was that experience like?

I loved the final result, but the experience of making it was stressful. For an indie film, it was extremely ambitious, an epic Summer blockbuster-type story at something like 0.15 percent of the cost. And that was the whole point, to stretch it as far as we could, but when it came time to bringing every shot and every image to reality, it was a massive undertaking and a miracle we pulled it off. The experience was a mixture of fun, and misery at times. But after it was done, watching it with an audience in a packed theatre night after night was an incredibly rewarding experience. Everybody laughed at all the right moments. It was amazing. The film was a fun-loving tribute to B-movies and gaming lore and conspiracies, combining the Roswell UFO crash with the Atari landfill. It’s just the sort of party film that combines everything I love and is meant for pure dumb entertainment and to have a good time.

Is there a chance we’ll see another movie?

No. Unless it’s animated maybe but my priorities are making an atmospheric horror film. Something that will still take a lot of work, but it will be much more low key and serious, in comparison with the humorous and epic scope of the *AVGN* movie.

***Angry Video Game Nerd Adventure* and *Angry Video Game Nerd Adventure II: ASSimilation* must have been big milestones for you and the character. How much were you involved in planning and creating the games?**

Well, I never intended to go into game development. I make films. But when the proposition came to me, of course I was excited for it, and am glad the games have been received well. I’m happy with what Freakzone Games and Screenwave have been doing with them.

Do you think there is ever going to be a point when you want to stop playing the Angry Video Game Nerd or are you hoping to just keep going?

I imagine doing them less. But I don’t think I intend to fully stop too soon, when so many people are still enjoying them so much. And I’d also have to find another job, if I ever do stop. It’s much more fun than any other job I could imagine. That makes it pretty hard to stop. But I do want to focus more on my art, mainly my film ideas.

Let’s say you decided to put an end to the character. How would he ‘ride off into the sunset’ before the ‘fade out’ so to speak?

There’s many episodes that felt like possible ▶

BEST OF THE WORST

James Rolfe picks the AVGN’s definitive episodes

ROB THE ROBOT

Episode 100, Released 2011

■ The AVGN celebrates his 100th episode with a Kaiju-style battle against the NES accessory that only had two Nintendo-licensed games to its rotten name. “This one was a bit of a change of heart for the Nerd character, because he defends the existence of the bad games from the robot, realising there must exist both bad and good,” James says.

EARTHBOUND

Episode 156, Released 2018

■ James’ years of filmmaking experience culminates in this complex episode that digs deep into the cult SNES game and the AVGN’s strengths and flaws as he dives deep into his subconscious just like Ness and his friends. James says, “It has more emotional depth than usual, and analyses a more complex game.”

BUGS BUNNY’S CRAZY CASTLE

Episode 75, Released 2009

■ The AVGN ramps up his talent for physical comedy as he gets into a *Looney Tunes*-style brawl with the wascally wabbit over this yawn-inducing sequel to *Bugs Bunny’s Birthday Blowout* on the NES. “This episode has some of the best slapstick and physical comedy in the series,” James tells us.

GAME BOY ACCESSORIES

Episode 147, Released 2017

■ Nintendo’s iconic portable game console produced a bunch of licensed and third-party accessories like the Light Boy spotlight and screen magnifier and the Game Boy Camera with its own printer. James feels that this episode has more of “a show and tell aspect, critiquing some of the bizarre peripherals that existed for the Game Boy”.

HOME ALONE

Episode 164, Released 2018

■ A big chunk of the games the AVGN has endured over 200 episodes cover games based on movies. This THQ clunker attracted the attention of Macaulay Culkin who joins the Nerd in his basement to roast this multi-console title. “This is a good example of a co-op episode, with guest star Macaulay Culkin and some ad-libbed dialogue,” James says.

CHECK THE LORE

A look at some of the AVGN's other familiar faces

MIKE MATEI

■ James' longtime friend Mike Matei has made numerous appearances in the Nerd's video reviews but it's usually been behind a Halloween mask or a face full of stage makeup. He's played some of the series' most memorable villains like Freddy Krueger, Bugs Bunny, Leatherface and Chop Top from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and the Joker. He's also the infamous Motherfucker Mike in Rolfe's board game series *Board James*. James says he's been one of the "biggest" driving forces behind the *AVGN* series.

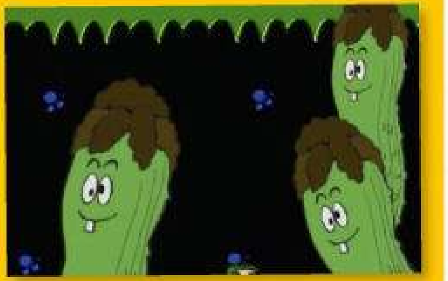
KYLE JUSTIN

■ There's only one word to describe Kyle Justin's contribution to the series: instrumental. The guitarist and singer composed and performed the Nerd's theme song for the series teeing up the Nerd for his eviscerating reviews of games so bad "he'd rather have a buffalo take a diarrhoea dump in his ear".

SKYLAR

■ One of the most annoying games the Nerd has reviewed over the last 15 years came from the glitch-filled space flight games *Cybermorph* and *Battlemorph* on Atari's Jaguar. EVERY time your craft would bump into something, a green AI with a human face called Skylar would pop on the screen and remark, "Where did you learn to fly?" The annoying cluster of pixels has made several re-appearances since her short but memorable battle with the Nerd who he quickly dispatched with a Super Scope shotgun blast to her stupid green face.

SHIT PICKLE



■ He's actually what you're thinking of right now: a pickle with poop on it. The cartoon creation who only says his name like a profane Groot appears in some of the Nerd's most scathing reviews of the worst of the worst from the gaming world like *Master Chu And The Drunkard Hu* and *Action 52* for the NES. The character has proven to be extremely popular considering he was simply made up in a single day by James and Mike Matei.

▶ finales such as *ROB*, *Mega Man*, and even *200*. But I don't know what the true end will be. I think of it like the *Rocky* series. Every film could have been the last one, and ends on that note, but then it finds a way to keep going. So if/when that time comes, I'll most certainly let everyone know. But it's hard to say when things are final. How many times has a band had a final farewell tour, and then came back?

What opportunities and avenues has producing and starring in the *Angry Video Game Nerd* series provided you?
Well, I have a Bachelor Of Fine Arts degree but doing this YouTube series has opened more doors for me. It's given me opportunities to connect with fans above all, but it's also helped me get the chance to make a big feature film (*Angry Video Game Nerd: The Movie*), steady employment, and hopefully soon bring some of my other creative ideas to reality. Really the biggest reward is being able to entertain and make people happy.

Do you have any major filmmaking goals outside of the *Angry Video Game Nerd* series with Cinemassacre?
I plan to make a horror film, possibly as a short, rather than a feature. And there's several other ideas that keep bouncing around in my head. The films I intend are a little less crazy than the *AVGN* movie, and more of an artistic expression. The recurring theme in my work is nostalgia, and especially when nostalgia goes wrong and takes a darker turn.

Is there anything you've learned from making episodes of the show that has helped you with your other film projects?
It's mostly the other way around. I think my background in filmmaking helped with *AVGN*. But I'm sure it also influences my filmmaking.

> "I'm happy making any creative project, whether it's an upcoming horror film, or a music video"
> James Rolfe

Your love for horror movies really shows through in your episodes. Is there anything from making and watching horror movies pretty much your entire life that's prepared you for making *Angry Video Game Nerd* episodes and the movie?
My horror film background definitely plays a part in those. I always enjoy adding a Halloween, horror element into *AVGN*. My favourite might be *Polybius* with its suspenseful, slow building, found-footage style.

What's the typical process for creating an *Angry Video Game Nerd* episode? What's changed about it over the years?
Surprisingly, it hasn't changed much. The process of sitting down with a shitty game, writing some notes, then developing it into a script is exactly the same

» The Angry Video Game Nerd attempts to play *Castlevania* on the NES with Mattel's unresponsive Power Glove controller.

» The Nerd weaponises Nintendo accessories like the Power Pad and the Super Scope for his battle with ROB The Robot.

» James reviewed the entire library of the short-lived Nintendo Virtual Boy console in 2008.

» The Angry Video Game Nerd isn't afraid to use a few blue words to describe how he feels about some of the worst games ever made.

» [PC] There aren't many YouTube personalities who star in a videogame, let alone two of them.

as it's always been, to the point where I feel déjà vu when creating an episode. The biggest difference is I have a ton of help on the editing. That frees me up, so I can start writing the next episode, while the current one is in post-production.

Who are some of the other people who've been instrumental in helping build the *Angry Video Game Nerd* show and its universe?
Over the years, there's countless people who have appeared in or worked on Nerd episodes, but Mike [Matei] and Kyle [Justin] were the two biggest ones. They are great friends and very supportive. The videos don't do it justice to show how awesome they've been off camera and the quality times we've had. In more recent years, Cinemassacre producers Justin Silverman, Kieran Fallon and all the Screenwave guys have been helping, who have also been super awesome, both on and off camera. I still take charge and be creative, while they take care of a lot of the tedious bullshit stuff, to free me up. It's the best workflow I've ever had.

» The Nerd's review of sports games for the Atari 2600 presented a unique challenge for the character's creator James Rolfe due to his lack of knowledge of the genre.

» James celebrated the 200th episode of the show by reviewing the entire library of LJN games including the 1995 SNES platformer *Cutthroat Island* based on the notorious film bomb of the same name.

We've got to ask. How did you come up with Shit Pickle?
Mike and I came up with it one day. It was one of those jokes with no meaning or depth, but somehow it stuck. Even though Shit Pickle is such a minor character, he's hard to forget.

One thing that's impressive is how you're able to mine material from games that are flat out boring like *Desert Bus* and *Plumbers Don't Wear Ties*. Is there a game that you've tried to turn into an episode that didn't work?
Those were episodes I never thought would work. Yeah. But they did. I can't think of any ultra-rare ones at the moment that I haven't done yet but I'm always finding something.

The games collection you have is extremely impressive. Has the games come from fans of the show or do you have a supplier?
They are from fan donations, and eBay. I don't actively collect as often anymore, since the walls are so full now.

» The Nerd goes full Hunter S Thompson with his review of *Vegas Stakes* that he played in front of the real Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas.

GUEST STARRING

James has teamed up with a few celebrities for various videos

Bring the rhino to her.

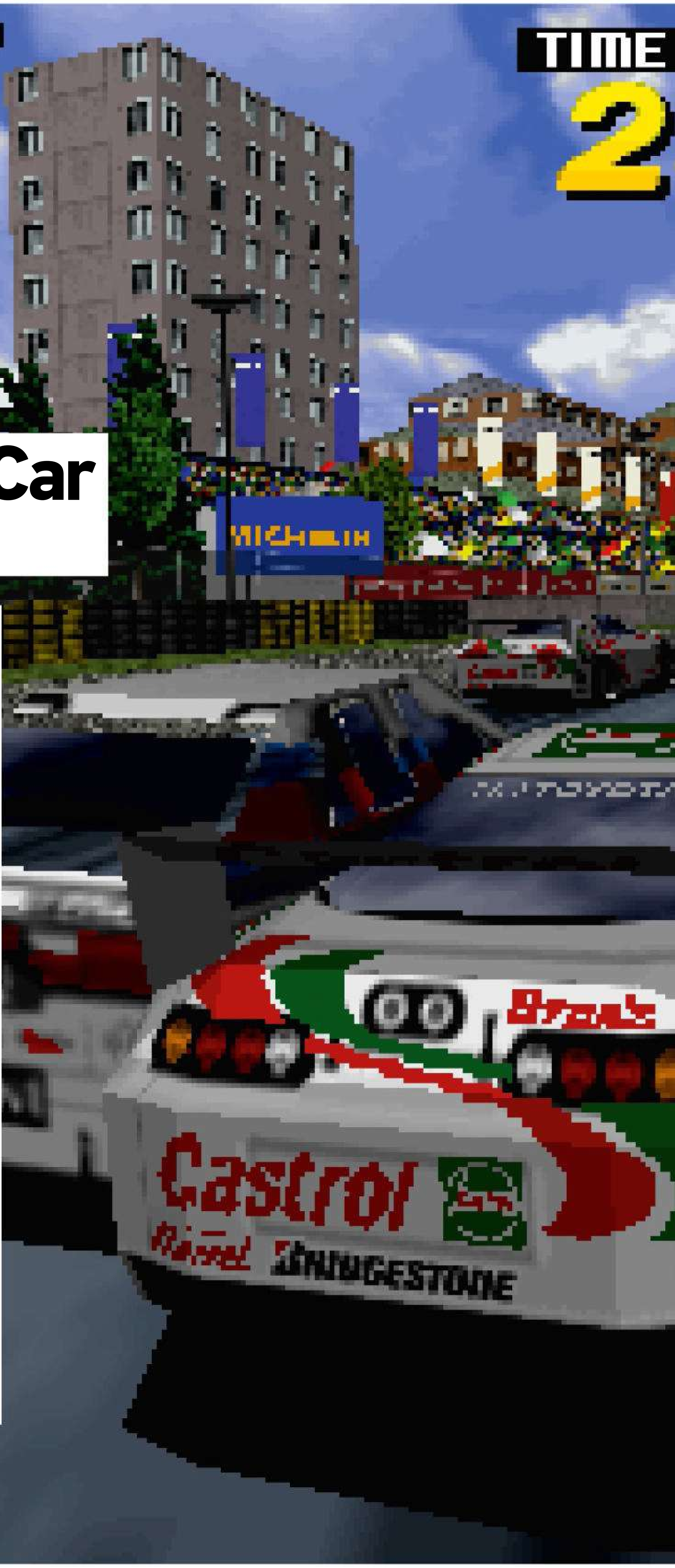
■ Some pretty famous faces have joined James Rolfe in his game basement to help him tear a new one to the bad games the Angry Video Game Nerd is forced to play. Troma Pictures founder and filmmaker Lloyd Kaufman helped the Nerd review the stiff NES side-scroller *Toxic Crusaders* that's based on the cartoon inspired by Kaufman's *Toxic Avenger* films. The Nerd travelled to the deep jungles of Asia after playing the Xbox bomb *Life Of Black Tiger* to meet the unfortunately named game designer Fred Fuchs played by legendary comedian Gilbert Gottfried. The Nerd played the entire library of *Home Alone* games on the NES and SNES with the films' actual star Macaulay Culkin.

Rolfe has even had some of the people make appearances in his videos and the *AVGN* movie who worked on the games he's lampooning. The movie featured a cameo of Atari game designer Howard Scott Warshaw who made the infamous *ET: The Extra Terrestrial* game for the Atari 2600. Rolfe's review of *Jurassic Park: Trespasser* featured Xbox designer Seamus Blackley as a James Bond-esque villain who traps the Nerd on his dinosaur island.

Where would you like to see the *Angry Video Game Nerd* series go now that you've hit your 200th episode?
I'm happy making any creative project, whether it's an upcoming horror film, or a music video, anything. I love it all. Over the years, I've also been finding other ways to celebrate video games, through music videos, parody movie trailers like *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: The Game: The Movie*. Things like that. ★

You can watch the *AVGN* series via YouTube at James' Cinemassacre channel.

» No game is safe from James' alter ego, not even those plastic Tiger Electronics' handheld LCD games.



Sega Touring Car Championship

"SO HIGH, LIKE THE SUN UP IN THE SKY"

» ARCADE » 1996 » SEGA AM ANNEX

Even as a kid with little access to arcade games, I *knew* that Sega made great arcade racing games. To me, this felt like the most obvious thing in the world. After all, I grew up playing *Out Run* on my Master System, and *Super Monaco GP* on my dad's Mega Drive. *Virtua Racing* looked like the most impressive thing in the world when I first saw it, and although it was quickly overshadowed by the *Daytona USA* and *Sega Rally* cabinets I'd seek out during every seaside holiday, I spent countless hours improving my lap times on the ex-rental Mega Drive copy I snagged for £4.

So when I read *GamesMaster*'s 53% review of the Saturn version of *Sega Touring Car Championship*, it felt like a bit of a kick in the knackers even though I didn't own the console. Conversions of Sega arcade racing games were always brilliant. Did I really not know as much about games as I thought? Astute readers will already know the answer to that, given the sorry state of *Out Run* on home computers and the visually challenged Saturn version of *Daytona USA*, but my young age and a lack of Saturn-owning friends had prevented me from experiencing either for myself.

Luckily, I soon had the opportunity to try the game. When Sega Park opened in the local shopping centre, there was a long row of twin racing cabinets with *Sega Touring Car* Championship on the very end, and it was there that I learned the horrible truth. The awkward handling and fairly bland racetracks meant that the arcade original simply wasn't up to the level of Sega's best, regardless of whatever went on with the conversion. But for some reason, I keep giving this game chances. I've put at least one credit into it every time I've seen a cabinet, and even bought the Saturn and PC versions. It's probably the soundtrack to be honest – I get excited every time I see that intro with Channel X's *So High* playing, only to end up disappointed all over again. I'm not too bright, really. ✱

LEFT
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COURSE RECORD
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12
13
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SPEED
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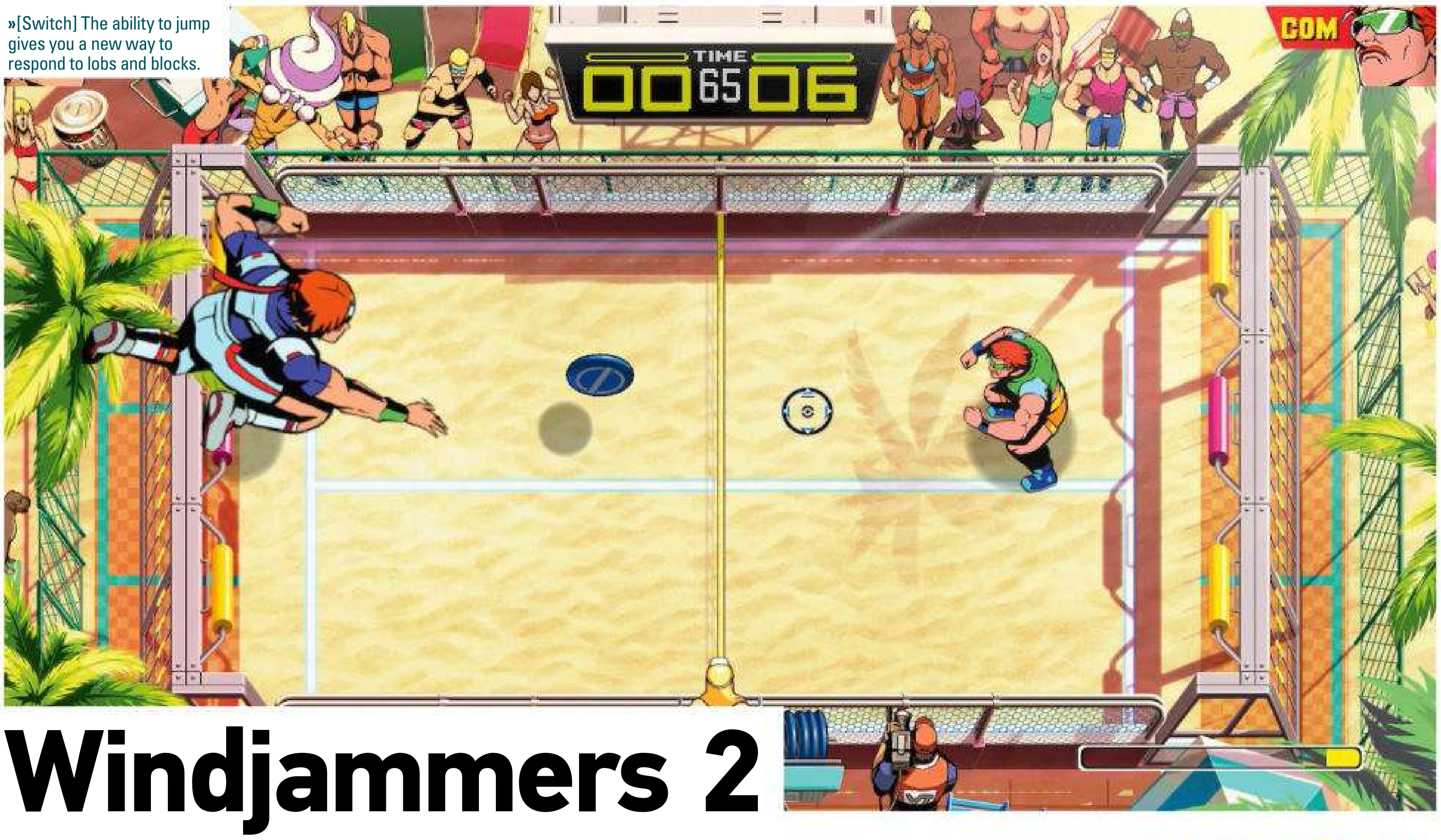
RETRORATED

>> This month we take the long-awaited Windjammers sequel for a spin, find out how Shadow Man's remaster fares on home consoles and revisit SNK's fantastic crossover game for the Neo Geo Pocket



»[Switch] The ability to jump gives you a new way to respond to lobs and blocks.

Windjammers 2

THE JAM, PUMPED UP

INFORMATION

» **FORMAT REVIEWED**
SWITCH

» **ALSO ON:**
PS4, XBOX ONE, PC, STADIA

» **RELEASED:**
OUT NOW

» **PRICE:**
£17.99

» **PUBLISHER:**
DOTEMU

» **DEVELOPER:**
DOTEMU

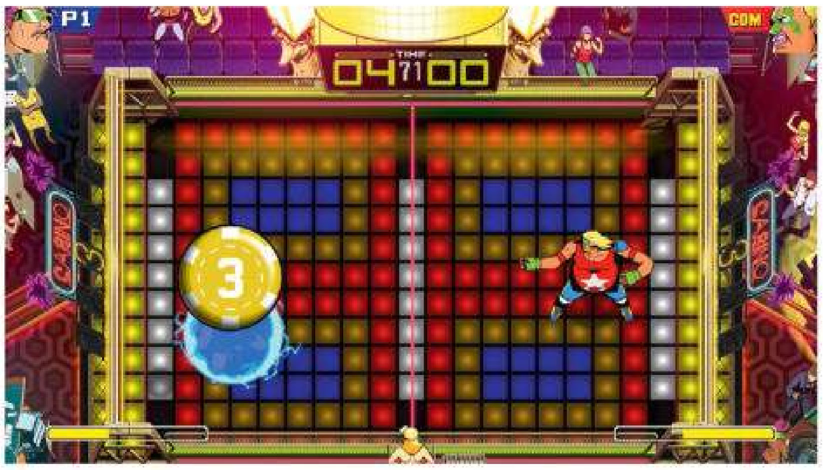
» **PLAYERS:**
1 -2

We love simple arcade games, but we'd never want to be a developer trying to develop a sequel to one of them. The trouble is that sometimes the original idea is so brilliant, it's incredibly tough to expand on it in any meaningful way. *Crazy Taxi 2* is a great example of this in action – the ability to jump isn't a bad addition to the game and the new city is fine, but we don't find ourselves missing them when we return to the first game. *Windjammers 2* is a sequel to a simple arcade game, and as big fans of the original, we were initially unconvinced that it needed to exist.

DotEmu hasn't set out to reinvent the wheel here. Like the Neo Geo original, *Windjammers 2* is a one-on-one sports game in which your goal is to fling a Frisbee past your opponent and into a goal, or have them fail to catch it. As before, you can do regular or lob shots, you can add curve, and if you block an opponent's shot and send it spinning into the air you can send back a powerful charged shot with special movement patterns. *Windjammers 2* adds a few new moves. You can now jump into the air to catch a lob, and while in the air it's possible to spike the disc into the ground. There's also a slap shot, which allows you to return the disc instantly without catching it. Finally, there's a super gauge that when fully charged, allows you to perform offensive or defensive moves.

Early on, we felt the additions to be somewhat pointless. Slap shots seemed too risky, and spiking the disc seemed like a low-value play. Having access to your super shot without charging was nice, but that was all. But as we played further and tried to work the moves into our game, we started to feel the benefit of them being there. It felt great to win a set by slapping the disc back while an opponent was recovering. The first time we used a defensive super to flip the disc into the air just as it was coming to rest on the ground, preventing a seemingly inevitable loss, was absolute magic. Pleasingly, it's entirely possible to counter the super moves too.

Then there's the spike. In the original game, landing the disc on

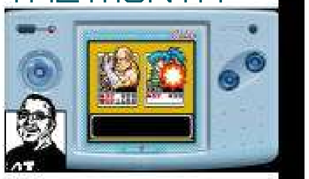


»[Switch] Casino is actually a choice in ranked online play, which seems a bit absurd to us.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Originally released for the Neo Geo in 1994, *Windjammers* is a game that draws elements from games including tennis and air hockey to create a new and entirely fictional sport. The game has remained a popular staple of multiplayer game nights, and was ported to modern platforms with online play by DotEmu in 2017. *Windjammers 2* has been developed by members of the team that ported the original game, and has been a long time coming – the game was announced by DotEmu in 2018 with a 2019 release date, and has been delayed repeatedly in the years since.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

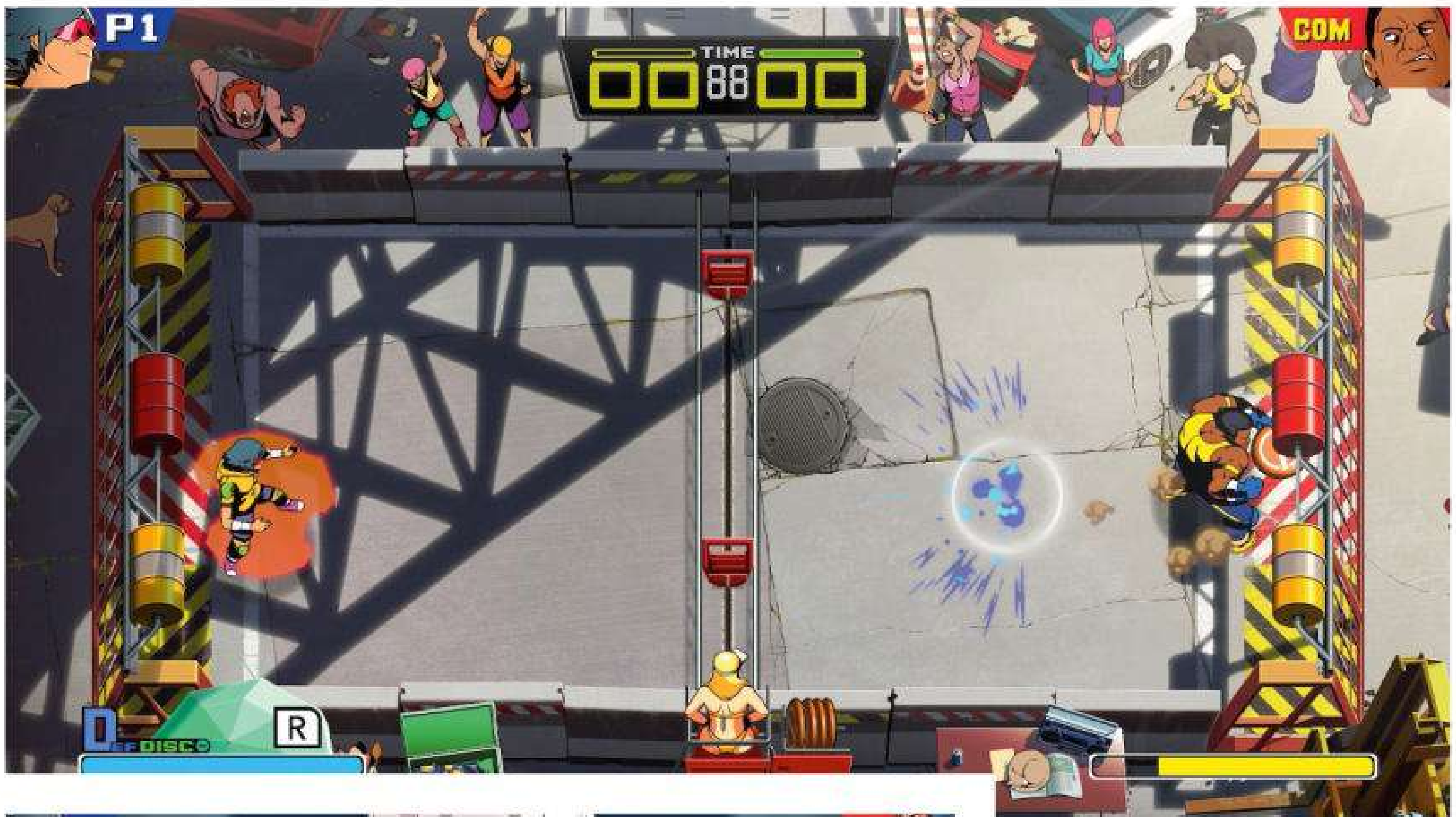
SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters' Clash

I've really enjoyed this on Switch. And best of all, long distance means Nick can no longer thrash me at it while visiting KFC.

NICK

Windjammers 2

Smashing the unsuspecting in online ranked games has been one of my great pleasures over the last month or so.



» [Switch] The moving barriers in the Junkyard stage are a neat and natural-feeling new feature.

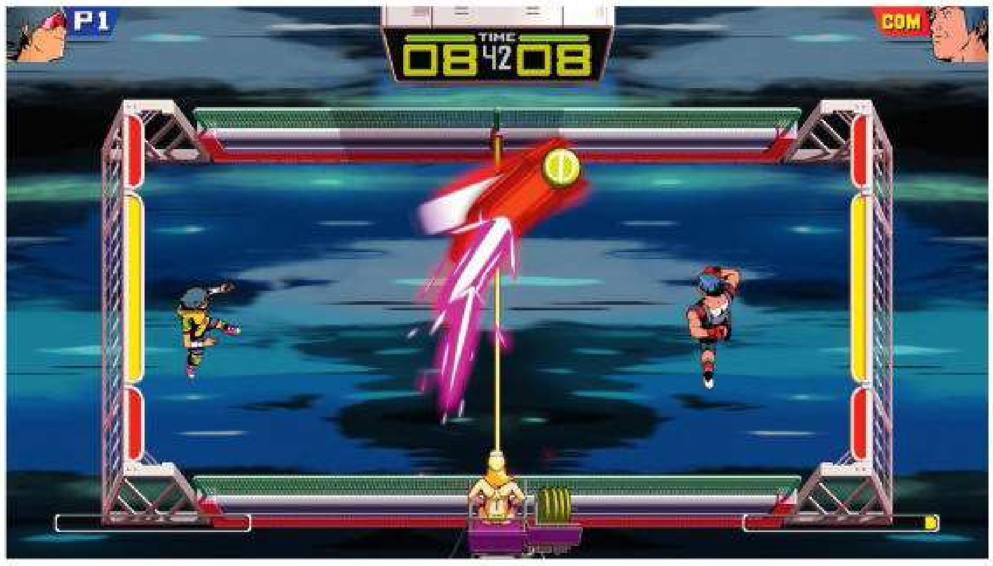
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

WINDJAMMERS

▼ SOMETHING NEW

ROCKET LEAGUE



» [Switch] The new super moves are an interesting addition, though some are definitely stronger than others.

the floor scored you just two points. Not so here – on some courts, that will earn you four points, making it a better play than the three-point goal. While we're talking about courts, there are some new ones this time around and they're a mixed bag. We really liked the Junkyard stage in which the central barriers move as they're hit by the disc. By contrast, the Casino really wound us up as scoring isn't determined by where you land the disc, but how many points the roulette wheel says it's worth. When you score repeated one or two-point discs, only to go behind after conceding a single shot worth eight points, it's quite easy to get wound up – we know we did. Thankfully, that is the only stage with such an irritating gimmick.

DotEmu seems to be banking on the longevity of the multiplayer action here, as the content offering is pretty slight. The character roster has doubled to a dozen competitors, each with different speed and power stats as well as unique special moves. In single-player mode, your goal is to beat five of them and win the championship, with a couple of minigame breaks between matches. This mode offers a fair challenge, especially since you have limited continues, though you can earn spare credits by scoring points during play. Beyond that, you have a local multiplayer mode and online play that performs well enough, and that's it.

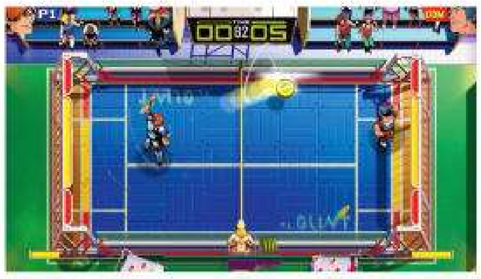
The graphics and audio carry the spirit of the Neo Geo game well, which is a good job as plenty of what's here is essentially remade from the original. It's got that bright Nineties look but never tips over into being garish, the character designs all have a good amount of charm and there are plenty of neat visual touches in stages like the scoreboard animations. The new music sits well alongside the old stuff too, and we particularly liked the Junkyard track.

Windjammers purists may be reading this and fretting about the addition of needless complexity and random elements like the Casino. We get it because we felt the same, and it's fair if that doesn't appeal to you. But ultimately, all of the speed and intensity we loved is present in *Windjammers 2*, just with some extra strategic options that make for some pretty exciting plays. After spending some quality time with this game we felt that familiar competitive rush, every rally delivering just as much excitement as any we had in the first game. So does it need to exist? Maybe not, but the fact is that it does, and we enjoyed playing it – and really, that's the only thing that counts. ✱

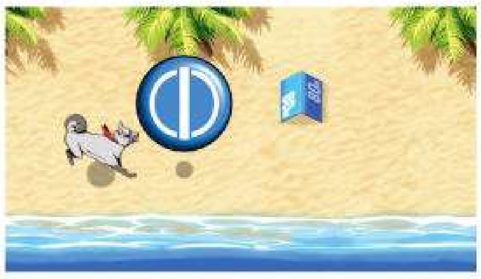
In a nutshell

Hard-core fans of the original may decry the new additions, but DotEmu has managed to expand upon *Windjammers* without losing its core appeal. There's not a lot for solo players, but it's a multiplayer classic.

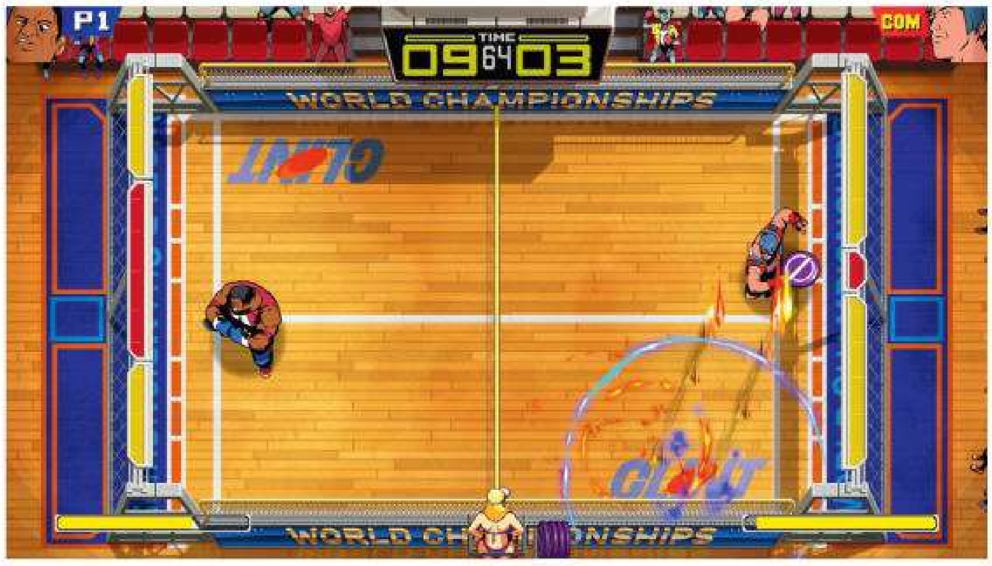
>> Score **86%**



» [Switch] We've returned the disc with a slap here, which is useful for catching opponents off-guard.



» [Switch] Dog Distance returns as Hot Dog Distance – it's the same, but with extra meaty pickups.



»[Switch] This stage expands your five-point goal zone each time you score, making it good for handicap matches.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Melkhior's Mansion

» System: PC **» Buy it from:** bitglint.itch.io **» Buy it for:** Free

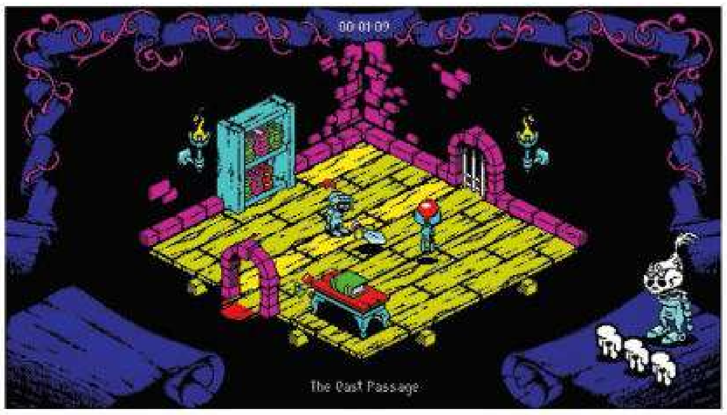
If you ever enjoyed an Ultimate game on the ZX Spectrum, *Melkhior's Mansion* will almost certainly feel like a big, warm hug. The game structure is essentially similar to *Atic Atac*, but displayed with the isometric perspective that Ultimate used for its later games. You run around the titular mansion trying to gather a number of items to complete your quest, which depends on the character you choose at the start. Complicating things are your ever-dwindling health, plenty of constantly respawning monsters, limited map access and the small amount of items you can hold simultaneously.

Melkhior's Mansion looks lovely. The game uses the ZX Spectrum colour palette without sticking to the computer's more cumbersome graphical technicalities, allowing the great pixel art to shine and providing an idealised version of that Eighties experience. If Sir Clive's machine wasn't your favourite, a wide variety of other palettes can be unlocked, from 8-bit classics such as the Commodore 64 to the more modern charms of the Pico-8 fantasy console. There's also some jaunty chiptune music to accompany you on your adventures.

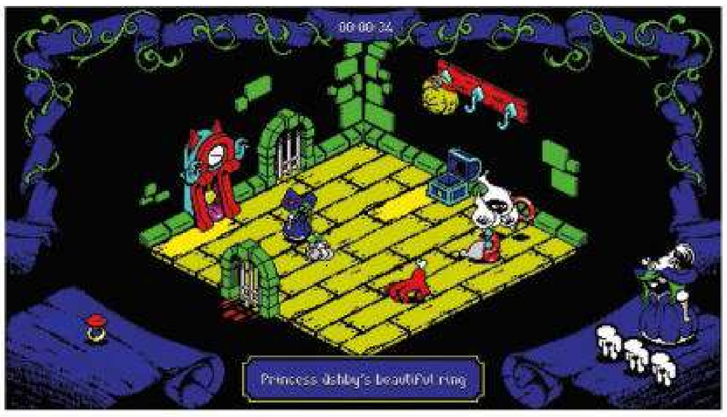
One criticism that we would make is of the difficulty level. It's a tough game even on the very easiest quest, and though that is entirely within the spirit of the era it is also something that can put off players that aren't quite as hardened. It would have been nice to see a choice akin to the Casual and Veteran modes in *Bloodstained: Curse Of The Moon*, ensuring that the game was more forgiving for those just starting out. We also experienced some technical issues with stuttering performance after restarting the game, which wasn't ideal.

Still, there's plenty to like about *Melkhior's Mansion* – the action never lets up, there's a good deal of replay value and it's fun to spot all of the references to Ultimate in general. It does a very good job of pleasing its target audience, and if you're not sure that includes you, you'll lose nothing by trying it out as it's absolutely free.

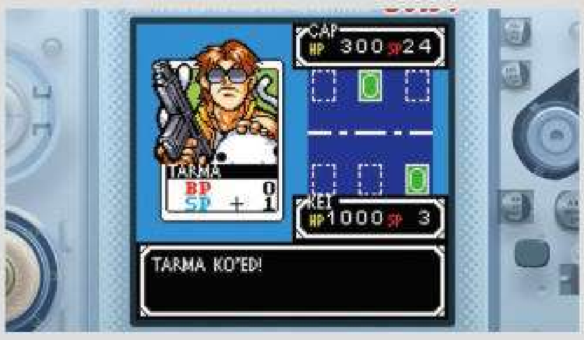
>> Score **85%**



»[PC] Bouncing projectile attacks are your main defence against the rampaging foes within the mansion.



»[PC] Zouch will spend a lot of time rummaging through chests during her quest.



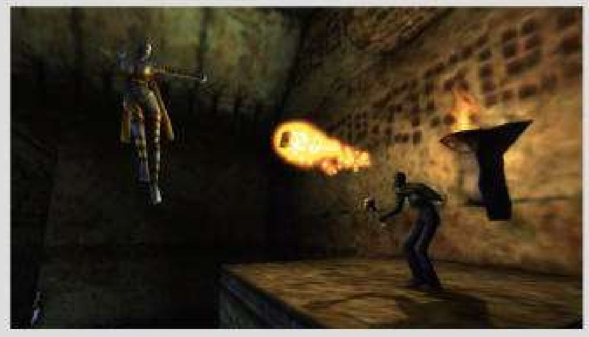
SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters' Clash

» System: Switch **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £7.19

This crossover card game was one of the very best Neo Geo Pocket Color games, and it's still great today. The cards grab your attention with beautiful pixel art, the battle system incorporates familiar character alliances, and the world is full of neat references to Capcom and SNK games. This Switch effort packs both Capcom and SNK versions into a single download, and allows you to trade cards between both versions. We appreciate the effort made in providing a multiplayer mode, but unfortunately it is severely limited – there's no online or local wireless capability, and both players must use the same deck. The result is a game that's still excellent for single-player, but does lose a big chunk of overall appeal.

NICK THORPE

>> Score **76%**



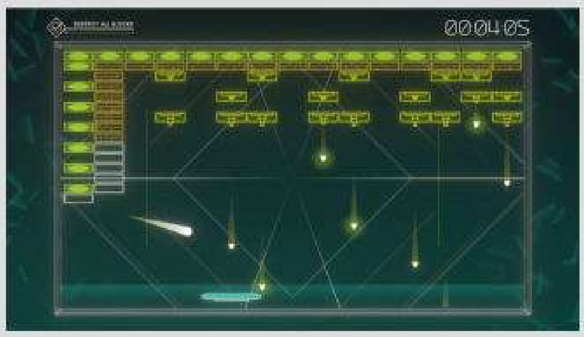
Shadow Man: Remastered

» System: Xbox Series S/X (tested), PS4/5, Xbox One, PC, Switch **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £16.74

Despite its popularity on systems like the Dreamcast and N64, Acclaim's *Shadow Man* was far from perfect. It's now been given a significant remaster courtesy of Nightdive Studios and the end result is very good indeed. While there's no denying certain clunkier aspects of *Shadow Man* remain, there are numerous quality of life changes too, like radial dials for selecting weapons, tweaked controls, auto targeting and other useful additions. It's also been souped-up graphically, with new animations and high-resolution textures. The team has even added three cut levels and remixed other stages as well, meaning there's plenty to discover, even if you've completed the game countless times before. It's further proof that Nightdive is in a league of its own when it comes to restoring classic games.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **80%**



Breakout: Recharged

» System: Switch (tested), PC, PS4/5, Xbox One/Series S/X, Atari VCS **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £16.99

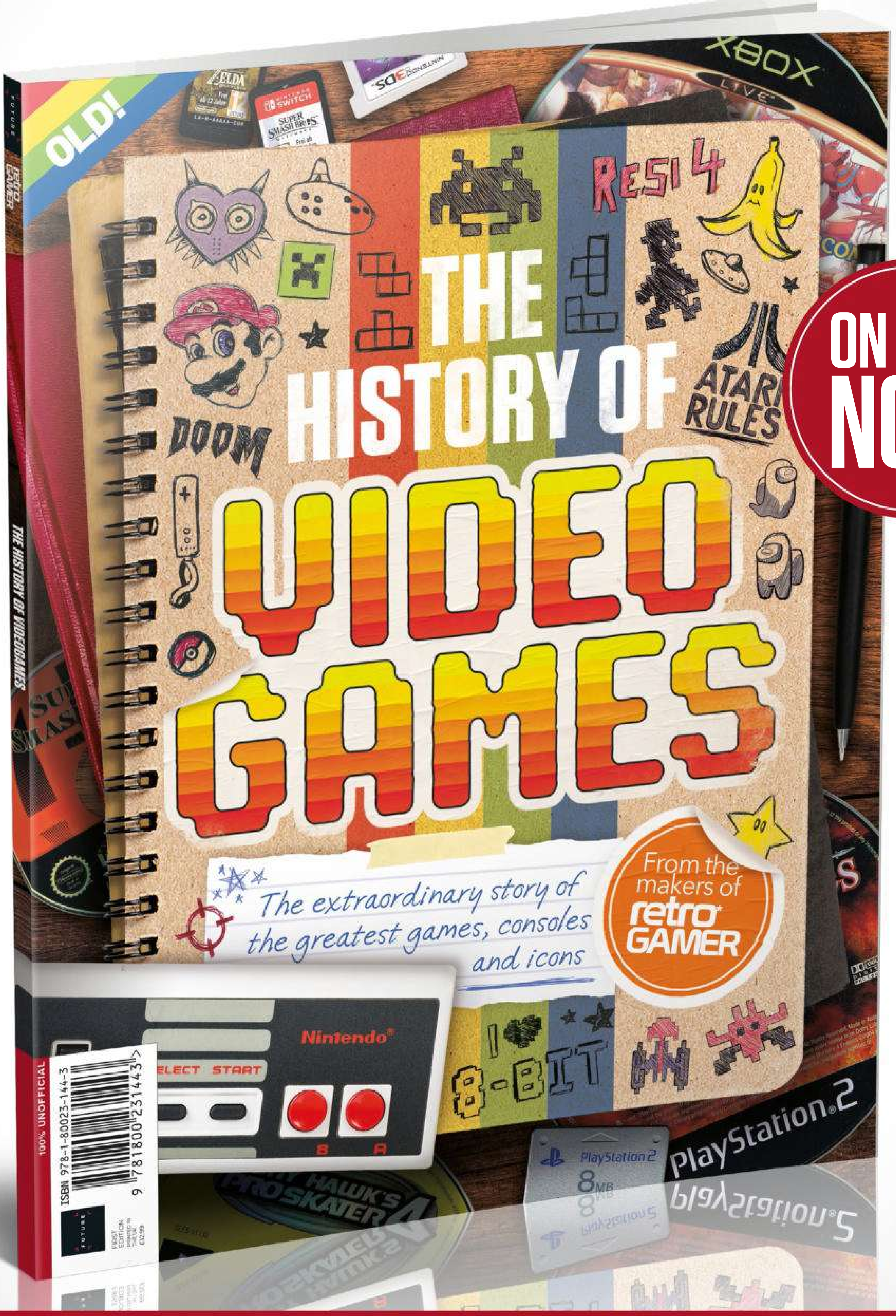
Atari has been doing a fine job revamping the classic arcade games in its library and *Breakout: Recharged* is no exception. Recharged mode is where you'll spend most of your time and it's good fun thanks to interesting wall designs and a selection of power-ups to tackle with a single life. Classic mode drops the power-ups but adds two extra lives and keeps the wall layouts (which slowly drop downwards like in Recharged) while Classic Recharged adds both lives and power-ups. There's an excellent Challenges mode as well which tasks you with scoring a set amount of points, avoiding enemy fire and clearing a set number of bricks. A second player can join in here or you can play a more traditional two-player game elsewhere. Yes it's simple, but it's also a lot of fun.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **73%**

TAKE A JOURNEY THOUGH VIDEOGAMING HISTORY

From the formative experiments of the Sixties, through to modern gaming today, embark on a decade-by-decade voyage across videogaming's entire history. Explore defining titles, legendary developers, killer consoles and more!



OLD!
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ATARI RULES
DOOM
I ♥ 8-BIT
XBOX LIVE
PlayStation 2
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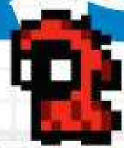
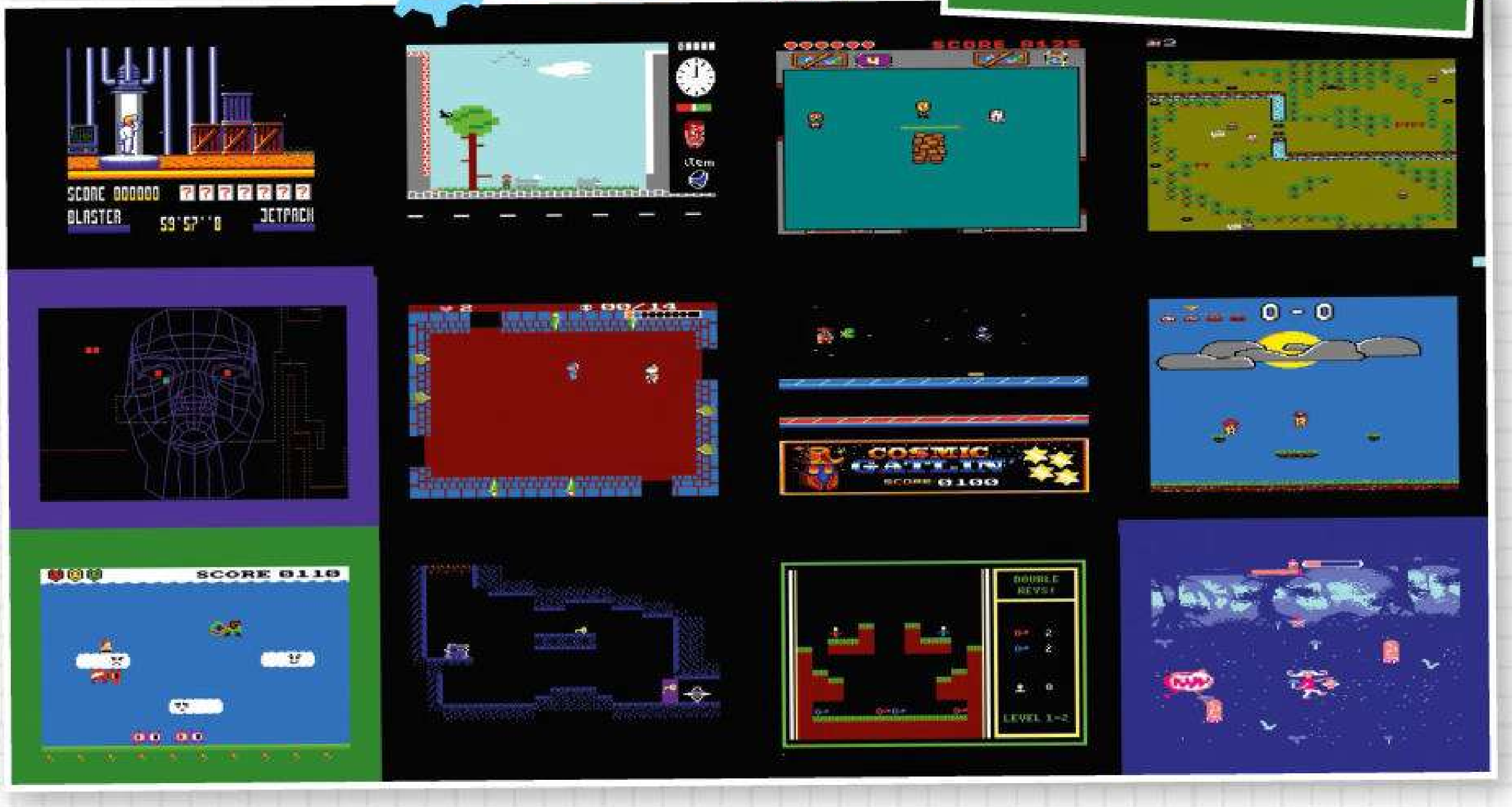
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

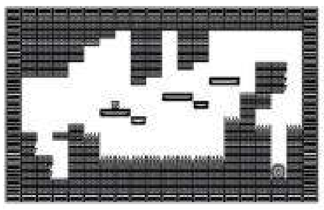
<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

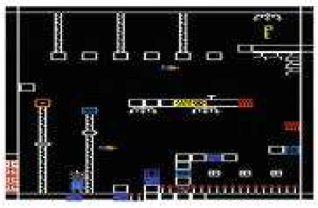


<INTRO> HOMEBREW RELEASES FOR RETRO COMPUTERS AND CONSOLES CONTINUED AT A RAPID PACE IN 2021, AND OUR HOMEBREW COLUMN IS ONCE AGAIN BACK TO COVER THEM. THE LOSS OF JASON KELK HIT US HARD AND IT'S NOT BEEN EASY FINDING A SUITABLE REPLACEMENT, BUT ANDREW FISHER IS KEEN TO TAKE ON THE TORCH THAT JASON HAD TO PUT DOWN. SO JOIN US FOR A REVAMPED HOMEBREW SECTION THAT WILL HOPEFULLY COVER ALL OF YOUR HOMEBREW NEEDS. </INTRO>



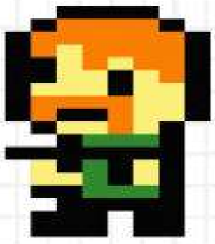
<!--- HERE'S MANY OF THE COMPETITION'S GAMES. THERE'S A GREAT AMOUNT OF VARIETY TO BE FOUND.--->





<MAIN HEADER>

CPC COMPETITION IMPRESSES



<INTRO> THE AMSTRAD HOMEBREW SCENE HAS EXPLODED IN RECENT YEARS, SO ANDREW DECIDED TO COVER CPCRETRODEV2021, THE LATEST GAMES JAM FOR THE SYSTEM </INTRO>

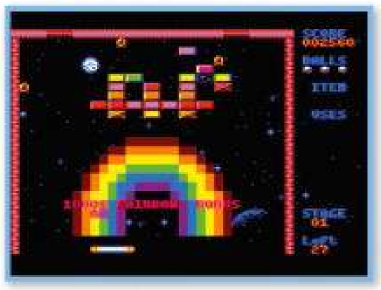
<BODY> **While a large number of things about 2021 were less than ideal, one of the more welcoming aspects about the year (at least from a homebrew perspective) was the sheer amount of Amstrad games that were released.** In fact, the CPCRetroDev2021 games jam featured such an impressive number of games that it's the first time Darran has truly missed his CPC 464 which was lost in the great skip clear-out of 2012 (Melanie denies all knowledge of the fateful incident).

The event ran from 15 October to 2 November and games were graded on a number of elements from joy, addictiveness and playability to global product and the usual graphics and artistic quality, as well as music and sound effects. Additionally, contestants could net 50 points if their game was submitted with Free Licence (GPL or MIT) and a further 25 points if it included a meaningful gesture to the classic game *Rainbow Islands*. Furthermore, all qualifying games needed to be playable on an unexpanded CPC 464 or via the emulators WinAPE 2.0 and Retro Virtual Machine v2.0. Games also had to load onto memory in a single pass and couldn't have been published or entered in previous competitions.

The games were judged by 13 experts and there was an impressive prize pool of 2,400 Euros which resulted in 37 entries. So without further fanfare, here's a look at some of the best games from the show. First up is *Shovel Adventure*, which ended up winning. It looks excellent, has good control and neat mechanics where you dig holes to attack enemies and pick up diamonds. It could have made an excellent budget game back in the Nineties and a Spectrum conversion is already available. We also like *Wireware* by CNGSoft thanks to its impressive look, which includes large sprites and clever background effects. The control of it is tough with enemies swarming you, while it features an interesting idea of escorting astronauts to safety. It's finished off with excellent music and sound. If you can get into it, it's a really fun game.

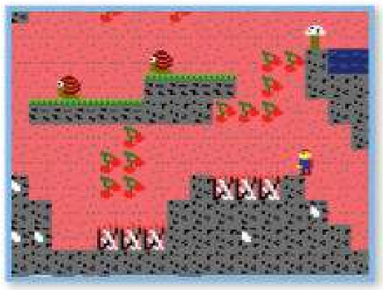
Survive The Week is an intriguing flick-screen adventure by Carlos Pérezgrin which netted third place. You have to find and use objects to carry out activities – but you need to get to work and also eat and sleep. It features excellent presentation and nice graphics with

MORE CPC HIGHLIGHTS



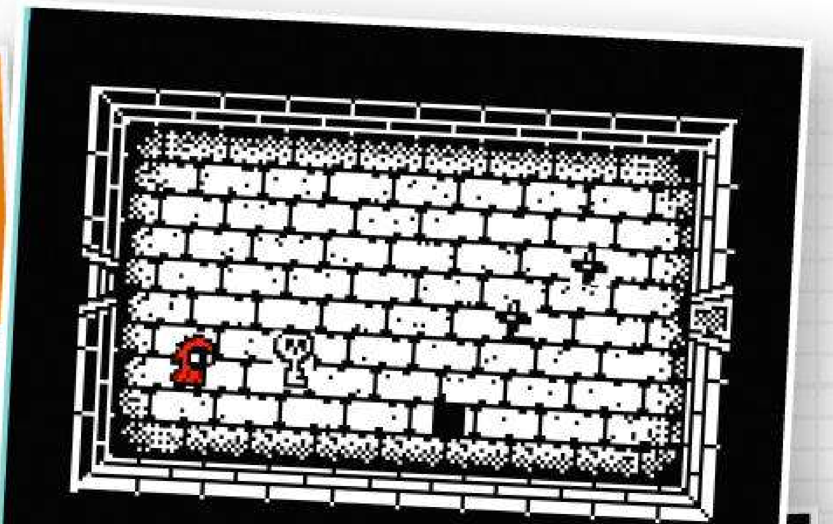
WRECKING BALL

<An excellent *Arkanoid* clone with good presentation, graphics, and sound. The only things letting it down are the limited ball angle and the distracting character-based movement of the enemies./>

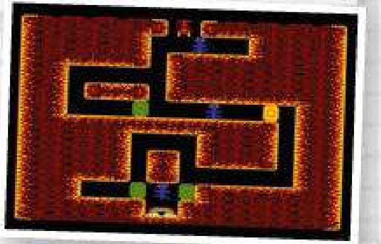


FITZROY DIVES DEEP

<This has great options including password and green/colour modes. There is some interesting gameplay, although it's not clear on the first few screens that you need scuba AND oxygen to swim./>



<!--- HERE WE HAVE EXODUS ESKPE (TOP), AMSTRED (RIGHT) AND COWNIGHT (BELOW) WHICH FINISHED IN 26TH, 20TH AND 35TH PLACE. --->



good sound throughout. Fourth place went to *Get Out Of My Store*, a great arena shooter where you defend burgers in your shop from zombies and other enemies. It has superb graphics and music and great presentation. It starts off slowly but new mechanics and a satisfying increasing difficulty make it good fun. Fifth place went to *The Capeture*, another flick-screen adventure, but one where you have to shoot or avoid numerous hazards. While it has very ordinary graphics the featured tunes are excellent. It feels very dated in places, but it is challenging to get through in certain modes. We've been seeing some great games being coded for the Amstrad CPC lately and the high quality of last year's games highlight just how prolific coders are becoming. Head on over to itch.io/jam/cpcretrodev2021/results where you can check out all the entrants for yourself. We'd love to hear about your favourites. </BODY>

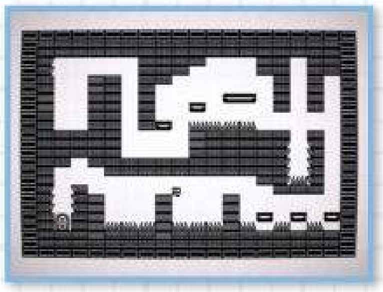
<INTRO>ADDITIONAL ENTRIES TO TRY</INTRO>

WRATH OF THE MCPC

<This has a brilliant intro sequence and clever in-game design with familiar *Snake*/light cycles gameplay with a couple of neat twists. The LambaSpeech version adds voice support with the hardware./>

CASTLE KID

<An arena shooter with cute design and music. There's an option for two players to have a go and there's also the useful ability to redefine keys. It's nice enough although it's not the most original of games./>



WRECKING BALL

<This is an increasingly difficult platformer with clever monochrome presentation and an extremely moody tune. The controls feel precise and difficulty is well-tuned. It reminds us of *Super Meat Boy*./>

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NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> YOUR SNACK-SIZED NEWS ITEMS </INTRO>

<BODY> <**Stop the press!** Zosya Entertainment, creator of the rather brilliant *Travels Through Time* reviewed this issue, has just released the new scrolling beat-'em-up *Angels* for ZX Spectrum (see above). With one or two-player action, special powers and cutscenes this is a real treat for fans of the genre. It's currently free to download at bit.ly/angelszx />

<The recent AmiGameJam had the theme of 'Ports' with categories for classic and next generation hardware/OS. Check it out at itch.io/jam/amigamejam/>

<The popular platformer *Chuckie Egg* has leapt onto VIC-20 (+32K RAM expansion) thanks to Derek and RESET64. Give it a try by visiting bit.ly/rg_vicegg />

<MSX cartridge *Souls Keeper* has been released by Oniric Factor, with enhanced MSX2 features. News on a second cartridge batch and a digital download can be found by heading to www.oniric-factor.com/>

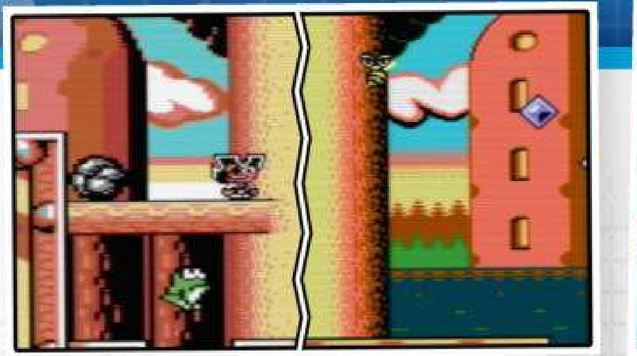
<Bitmap Soft has released *Doc Cosmos* on Game Boy Colour, along with original Game Boy titles *Tales Of Monsterland* and *Pineapple Boy*. Find them all at www.bitmapsoft.co.uk/>

<*Prince Of Persia* took a big stride onto Atari XL/XE (it requires 128K of memory). You can play it by visiting bit.ly/persiaxl />

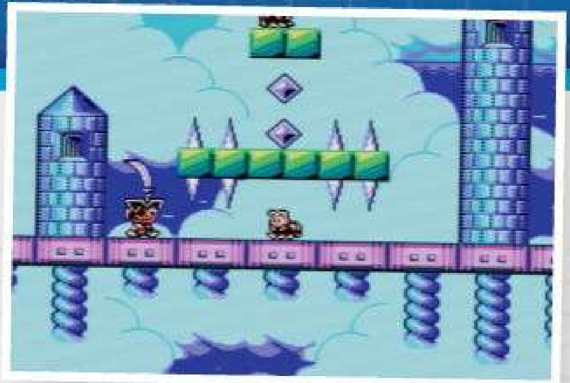
<Double Sided Games has resumed shipping to the UK. Its Amiga dungeon-crawler *The Shadows Of Segroth* (2Mb RAM, A1200 recommended) is now available to buy. Head on over to doublesidedgames.com/shop/>

<Cronosoft has released *Paleto Jones* by Mananuk, and the 18+ rated 'grimdark' text adventure *The Iron Wolves* by Andy Remic, both for the ZX Spectrum. EU buyers are advised to purchase via eBay, so IOSS VAT is prepaid. You can find more information at cronosoft.fwscart.com/> </BODY>

SOULS KEEPER
LIFE:095 GIFT [ ] ITEM:0/2



<!--- C64 ORIGINAL ON THE LEFT, NES CONVERSION ON THE RIGHT. --->



<!--- [NES] FLIP OUT LIKE A NINJA WITH SAM'S JOURNEY. --->

CHAMPION CODER

CHESTER KOLLSCHEN

<INTRO> THE KNIGHTS OF BYTES PROGRAMMER TALKS ABOUT THE FORTHCOMING NES CONVERSION OF SAM'S JOURNEY </INTRO>

WERE YOU PLEASED WITH THE SUCCESS OF SAM'S JOURNEY ON C64?

<The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Casual gamers found the unlimited retries and save game feature very enjoyable while hardcore gamers took the challenge of finding all the secrets. It has sold more than 3,000 units and counting./>

WHY CONVERT IT TO THE NES?

<The primary intention of creating *Sam's Journey* was to bring console-style platform action to the C64. Porting it to the NES feels like bringing it home again./>

WHAT DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM DO YOU USE?

<We're using our own editor to draw graphics, create the game world and populate it with objects. Tools written in Python are used to convert into binary data. Code is written in 6502 assembly and then compiled using the ca65 assembler./>

ARE YOU TESTING SAM'S JOURNEY ON REAL HARDWARE?

<Always! The NES has loads of hardware quirks. Many of those still aren't properly emulated. As we are releasing *Sam's Journey* on physical media, we must make sure that the NES version runs flawlessly. We put in some extra work to create a fully adjusted NTSC version. PAL and NTSC players will experience nearly the same gameplay in terms of speed./>

DO ANY OF THE GRAPHICS NEED TO BE REWORKED?

<On the NES the resolution is higher, but the visible part of the screen is narrower. You have more colours but cannot use them as flexibly as the C64. Stefan redrew all the graphics and adjusted a few maps./>

WILL THE MUSIC BE REWRITTEN?

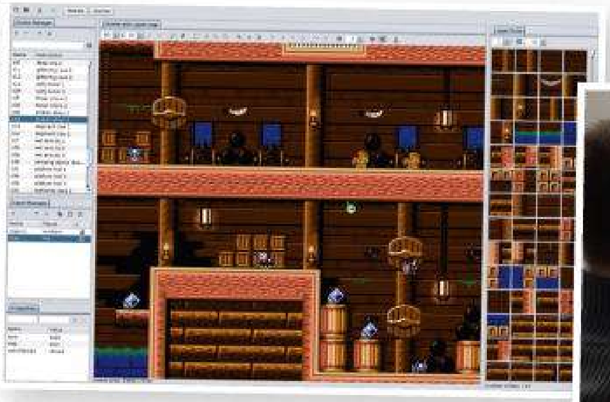
<The NES' APU has one waveform generator more than SID, but you cannot assign any waveform to any generator. Despite these and other differences, Alex did a great job and we're confident the NES soundtrack will swing and groove./>

WHAT WILL BE IN THE FINAL PACKAGE?

<There will be a standard edition as awesome as the C64 version. A limited *Ultimate Edition* will contain extra gimmicks. A poster can be added, as can an audio CD with the NES soundtrack. For fans who don't have access to real hardware, we are considering a digital download./>

WHAT OTHER GAMES ARE YOU CURRENTLY PLANNING?

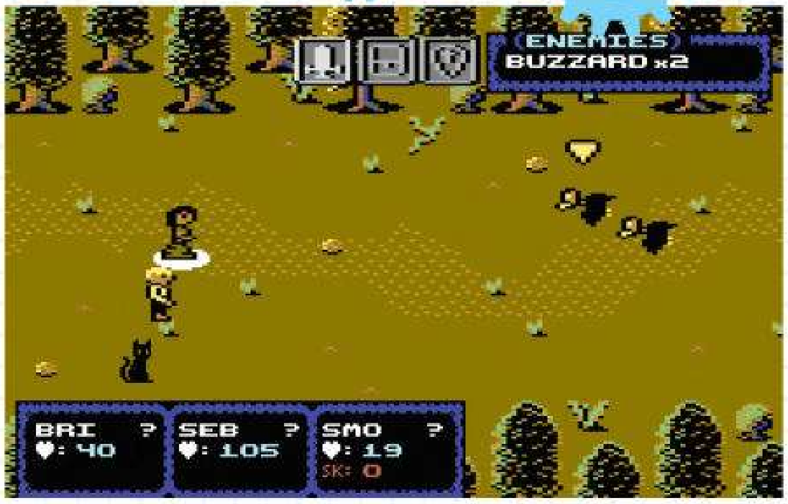
<Another game for the C64, but this time with a darker theme and a grittier atmosphere. We're also keen on exploring the SNES./>



<!--- PIRATES AHOY! CREATING A LEVEL FOR THE NES VERSION OF SAM'S JOURNEY. --->

<!--- SAM KEEPS CHESTER COMPANY WHILE HE WORKS ON THE NES CONVERSION. --->

DATA BURST



THE BRILEY WITCH CHRONICLES

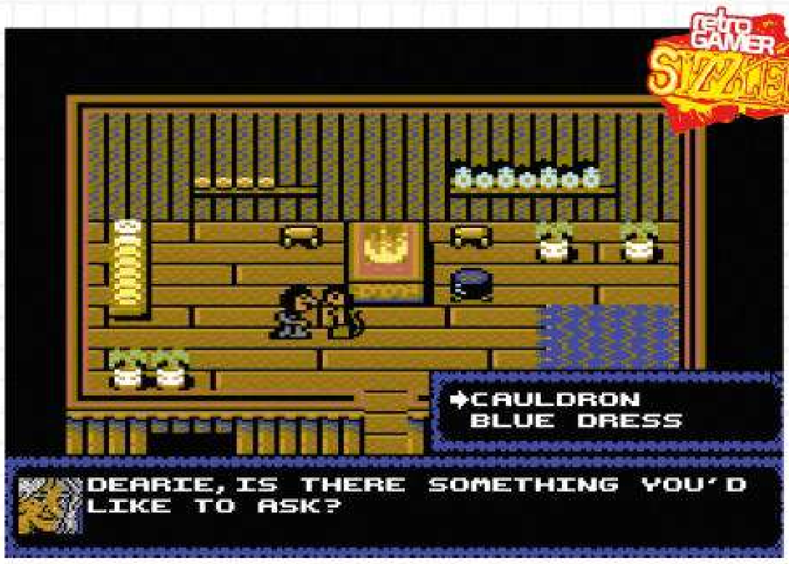
<INFO BY: WITCHSOFT – SARAH JANE AVORY, PAOLO RATHJEAN
FORMAT: C64 PRICE: DIGITAL DOWNLOAD $9.99 PLUS SALES TAX (20% VAT IN UK) VISIT: BIT.LY/RG-BRILEY />

<BODY> **This Japanese-inspired RPG is based on Sarah Jane Avory's own series of fantasy novels.** Briley returns home from an exhausting day to feed her cat Smokey. Meditating to relax, she's drawn to another world ruled by magic where Smokey can talk. With help from others, Briley must cure a cursed village as she learns how to be a witch.

Following the intro sequence, the main menu offers New Game or Continue; four save slots are available on cartridge or blank disk. Members of the party dutifully follow Briley around. You can interact with objects and people by pressing fire, or hold down fire to enter the menu system. A useful Remind option hints at what you should do next, while dialogue with others can include a choice of topics. Random encounters lead to *Final Fantasy*-style turn-based battles, where you can use your earned magic and special skills.

The game is beautifully presented, with miniature portraits of each character when they talk. Other nice graphical touches include the subdued palette when exploring the village at night, and the world map that opens once you have left the village. The music evolves and changes as the story progresses, with some neat jingles and well-suited sound effects. Everything can be controlled from a single joystick, and the well-crafted story will take more than 15 hours to complete. Sarah is starting work on the sequels and an Amiga conversion, so make sure you play one of the best RPGs on the C64. </BODY>

SCORE: 95%



DEARIE, IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'D LIKE TO ASK?

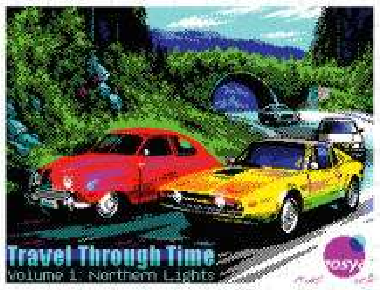
TRAVELS THROUGH TIME – VOLUME 1: NORTHERN LIGHTS

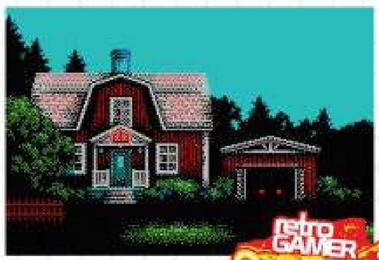
<INFO BY: ZOSYA ENTERTAINMENT - KIT, MANU FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM WITH 128K MEMORY PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD OR TAPE VERSION (WITH SOUNDTRACK CD & DATA CD) £14.99 WEBSITE: BIT.LY/NORTHERNLIGHTSZX />

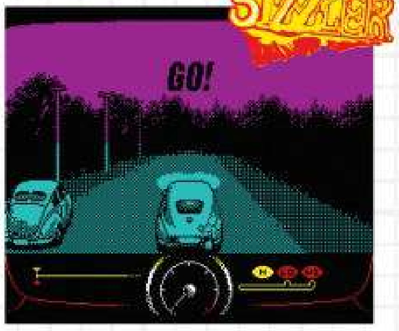
<BODY> **Boy racer Sven takes on a series of races – time trials, checkpoint races and duels against various rivals.** In early stages you can try again repeatedly, but later you are restricted in the number of attempts. Cutscenes tell a story from the Fifties to the Eighties, with different vehicles to drive.

The graphics here really impress, with large cars and amazing roadside scenery. Sound works well, with a good soundtrack and respectable engine noises. Presentation is fantastic – although control can feel loose with early vehicles. With so many levels to play through, this is a game that will keep you hooked. Oh, and head to zosya.bandcamp.com where you can stream the soundtrack for free. </BODY>

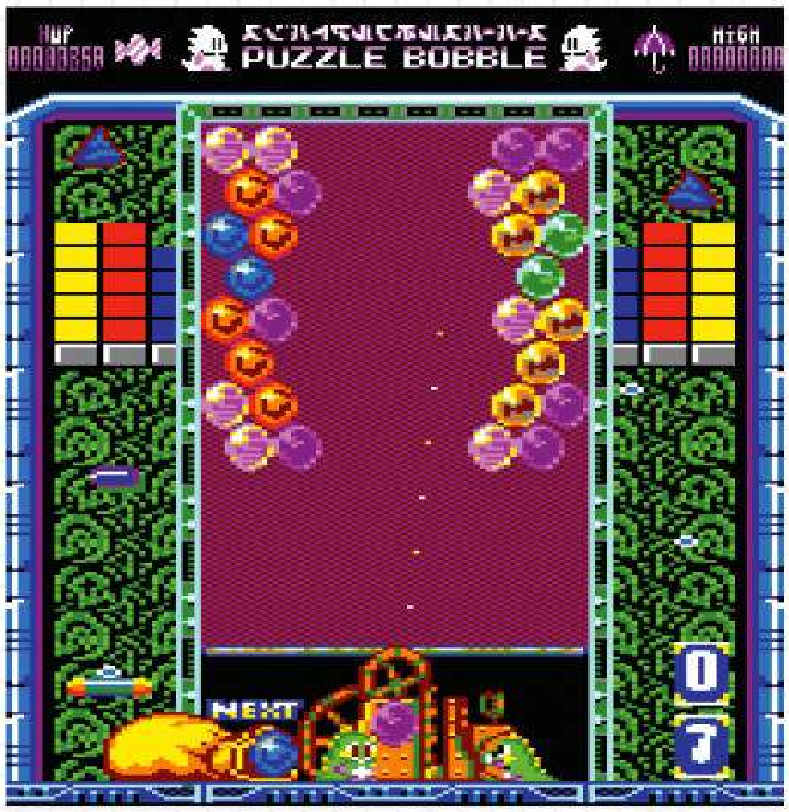
SCORE: **90%**

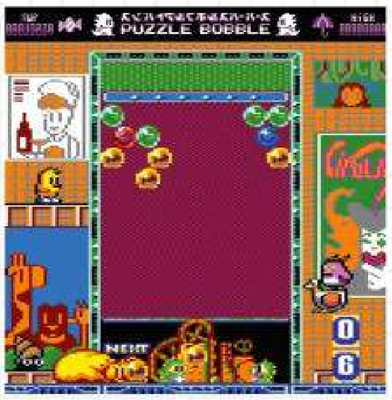






retro GAMER SIZZLER





PUZZLE BOBBLE
パズルボブル
TAITO

PUZZLE BOBBLE

<INFO BY: CRAZY PIRI FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE DOWNLOAD WEBSITE: CRAZYPIRI.ITCH.IO/PUZZLE-BOBBLE />

<BODY> **The Taito arcade game reaches the CPC in colourful style, with 100 single-player levels to master.** It neatly pays tribute to other Taito games too, with a frame surrounding the main play screen to represent *Arkanoid*, *Chase HQ*, *Bubble Bobble* and more with the music switching to match. The sound FX and speech are good too, and gameplay is fun – although turning your pointer does feel slightly slow compared to other versions. It's also a real shame that the puzzle mode and head-to-head gameplay are missing as well. Even with those omissions, this remains great fun and Amstrad owners should not miss it. </BODY>

SCORE: **84%**

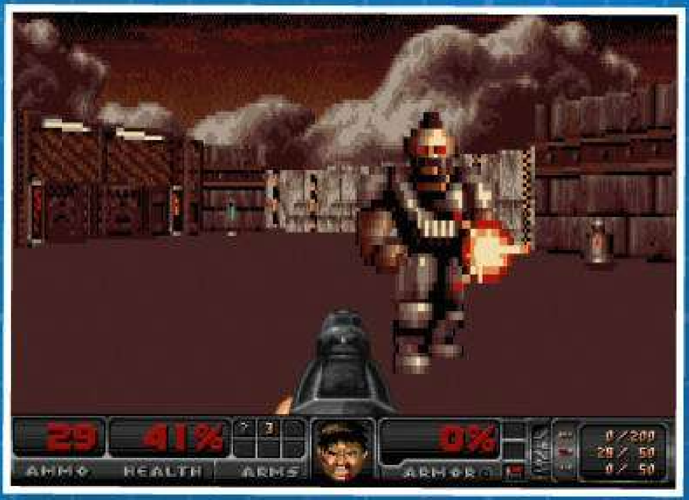
PROCESSING

<INTRO> HERE'S A SELECTION OF INTERESTING GAMES THAT WEREN'T READY IN TIME FOR THIS ISSUE. LOOK OUT FOR THEM SHORTLY </INTRO>

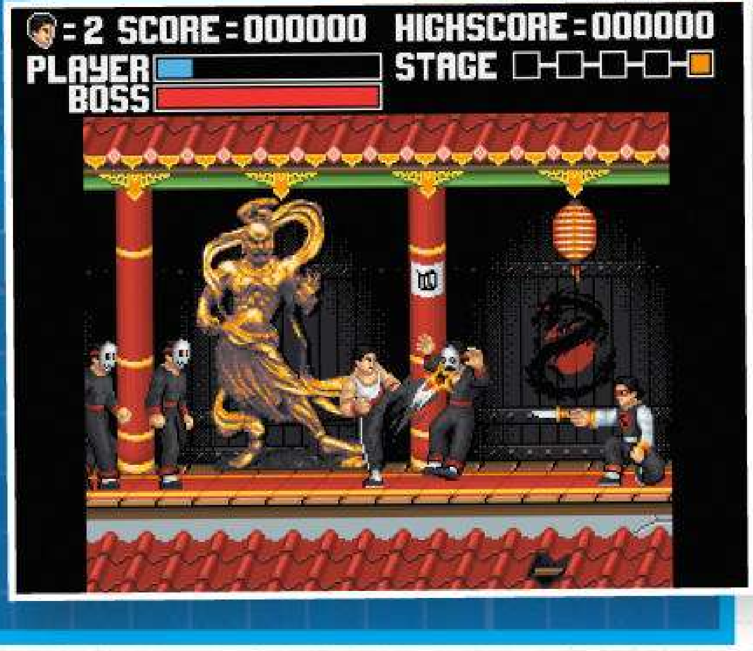
<BODY> ***Dread* is an amazing first-person shooter from Altair and Pixelglass, recreating the look and feel of *Doom*.** The astonishing thing is that it runs on a standard Amiga 500 or ST with 1Mb of RAM, so no accelerator or other hardware is needed! Watch the video diary of the demo map and get download links at bit.ly/dread-9

Pigsy is converting *The GG Shinobi* (from Sega's Game Gear) and the PlayStation classic *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* to Sega's Mega Drive. You can visit their YouTube channel at bit.ly/rg-pigsy to see the latest builds and a preview of the games running on real hardware. The excellent music is covered by Alianger and Pyron is creating the graphics.

Graeme Cowie is hard at work on *Devil's Temple: Son Of The Kung Fu Master* for the Amiga – mcgeezer.itch.io/kung-fu-remaster – with graphics by TenShu and sound by DJ Metune. It draws inspiration from the classic *Kung-Fu Master* arcade game by Irem, reimagined more in the mould of the later *Vigilante* (another Irem classic). The preview screens look amazing, and a brand-new playable demo is now available. We will be interviewing Graeme shortly about the creation of this game and his other great Amiga titles. </BODY>



<!--- [AMIGA] THE BIG ENEMY WITH THE MINIGUN WILL DO HEAVY DAMAGE TO YOU IN DREAD. --->



HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING IS

FIRST LOVES

The machines that formed our gaming habits

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Every gaming enthusiast starts somewhere, and quite often that start ends up influencing your tastes down the line. We got together as a team to talk about the machines that introduced us to the wonderful world of videogames, but ended up going on a bit of a tangent too, talking about our first experiences with other types of hardware and even the misuse of funds intended for educational purposes…

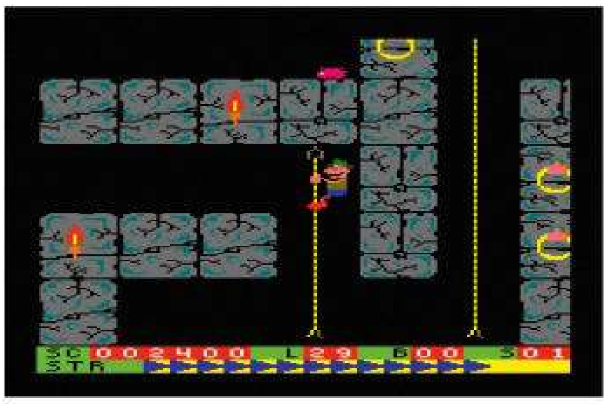
NICK
I already know Darran's answer here, but what was your first gaming machine?

TIM
Mine was a Commodore 64 back in 1985 I think.

DARRAN
We had an old orange Binatone system that was passed down to us, but the first actual system I owned was an Amstrad CPC 464 that I received for my 14th birthday. That would have been 1987.

NICK
My dad gave me his Atari 2600 Jr after he got his Mega Drive, which was in 1992. What were the first games you guys played on those new machines?

TIM
Crazy Kong! Please get a screenshot of this because even with rose-tinted nostalgia specs on it looked absolutely atrocious. I need to see it with fresh eyes.



» [Amstrad CPC] The first game Darran loved was *Roland On The Ropes*, a common favourite among Amstrad owners.

DARRAN
Amstrads came with a pack of 12 Amsoft games that ranged from educational programs to games like *Bridge It*, *Harrier Attack* and *Oh Mummy*. I'm pretty sure the first game I loved was *Roland On The Ropes*. I also somehow received two packs, rather than one, so I had lots to play.

NICK
I think *Donkey Kong* or *Centipede* would have been the first Atari games I played, but I was too young to remember for sure. I think my favourite of the games I was given ended up being *Dig Dug*, though.

TIM
Heh, the C64 also came with *Frogger* (or some derivative of it) but it wasn't supposed to be included and my brother and I were told not to play it as it was going to be returned. But we put it on anyway – sorry mum.

DARRAN
Dig Dug, Nick? So even before *Sonic* you had terrible taste in games. All joking aside, can you remember the first game you bought? For me it was *The Apprentice* by Mastertronic and it was nowhere near as good as its cover suggested.

NICK
We used to have a market stall that sold 2600 carts for £1 each, and again I was too young to remember, but it would have been either *Pitfall!* or *Pac-Man*. I know they have very different reputations but I loved them both because I'd never played a more authentic version of *Pac-Man*.

DARRAN
Yup, budget games were quite the saviour back then. I remember my nan would take me to bingo and if I had been good or she had had a decent win, she'd buy me a book on the way back or a game. I'd typically grab a Codemasters release and had a near-complete collection before they all got chucked in a skip.

ASTRO WARS
GRANDSTAND

» Going from *Astro Wars* to a Game Boy Advance is a big upgrade when it comes to portable gaming!

> "I've pretty much bought my own games and systems aside from that Amstrad"
> DARRAN JONES

TIM
My brother and I spent most of our pocket money on Mastertronic games because they were so cheap. We had loads of them, unfortunately one of them was *BMX Racer*. Though one time we pooled our birthday money together and got *Space Harrier*, it was a tenner!

DARRAN
I think the first Amstrad game I purchased for a tenner was *Sabre Wulf*. The sprites were a little chunkier than the Spectrum version but I still loved it. In all fairness I was working full-time when I was 15 so I soon got hold of my first console, Sega's Master System when I was 16. Did either of you go down the rites of passage route of using part of your student loan to buy a console? I hear that was a thing.

NICK
I was really fortunate, my mum bought me a Wii for my first Christmas at uni – it was the first time I'd ever got a console within a month of its launch! So I didn't need to spend my student loan on a console. Not that it stopped me buying a new old stock PAL Turbografx a few months later, of course.

DARRAN
That's my boy. What about you, Tim? Did you splurge your loan?

TIM
I didn't actually. I wasn't really a proper student until my 30s and by that time I had an Xbox 360. In the Nineties I spent birthday money and some savings on a Mega Drive and then a PlayStation a few years later though. Primarily for

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RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

Street Fighter II and then *Tekken 2*. I've totally skipped over the Amiga years – we had two big disk boxes filled with copied games.

DARRAN
I've been in an unusual situation where I've pretty much bought my own games and systems aside from that Amstrad. I do recall Melanie buying me *The Lion King* Mega Drive bundle one Christmas, but generally I've always bought my own, including my first import console which was a Mega Drive.

NICK
How about handhelds? I was really late to getting one, my first was a Game Boy Color that I got when *Pokémon* came out.

TIM
Aside from *Astro Wars*, I didn't have a handheld until I snaffled a Game Boy Advance SP from the *Cube* desk. A DS followed that but I eventually sold it. My brother gave me his old DS Lite a few years ago, but I haven't played it much.

DARRAN
My first was an Atari Lynx and I absolutely adored it. I picked up a fair few games for it, but eventually got really annoyed as I only knew one other person with the system as everyone else had Game Boys. You should go back to the DS Tim, as it's a great little system. In fact that would make for a good Hot Topic at one point.

NICK
See that's where I was lucky – *Pokémon* made it pretty obvious what everyone else was getting. Of course, I then bungled the social aspect by picking up *Street Fighter Alpha* as my first game, which didn't incorporate a two-player mode.

DARRAN
Well if you were as good at *Street Fighter* as you were at *Card Fighters' Clash* then that's probably a good thing as you'd have ended up with no friends! ✱

» Tim was the first of us to have his own games machine, and it was a pretty good one too.

» [C64] Tim's first £10 game was Elite's conversion of *Space Harrier* – definitely a better pick than certain other 8-bit Sega conversions.

Credit: Evan Amos

» The youngest member of our team actually started out with the oldest technology – funny how that works.

READERS REACT

What were the first computers/consoles and games you owned?

Rev Phil Richardson
Amstrad CPC 6128… too late really, by that point NES and Mega Drive were far cooler. But it did introduce me to *North And South*, *Spy Versus Spy* and somewhere at my parents' house is a big box copy of *Osprey*!

Anthony Harris
My first machine was a Commodore 64 which my parents bought for my seventh birthday. They bought it for me from Dixons, Cardiff, on the day of the ladies Wimbledon final and I was so excited I threw up outside the shop!

Jake Warren
Saturday, 18 June 1983, we bought a Spectrum 48K from WHSmith in Bristol along with a copy of *Flight Simulation* by Sinclair. I still have them and the computer is still working.

Phil Rowland
Out of the blue once, my dad brought home a Philips Videopac on an 'ask no questions' basis. With a downhill skiing game and a shooter called *Freedom Fighters* that blew my prepubescent mind.

James Moorehead
Amiga 500+. Me and my parents lived in Turkey at the time as my dad worked on a plant out there. A friend of his had the Amiga and I'd play it when we went over there, he sold it to my dad and the rest is history. First game was either *Superfrog*, *Pinball Dreams* or *Lotus 3*.

Mike Larky
NES with *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* for Christmas 1990. Changed my life! Being seven it just blew my mind! I sadly had to sell it and a huge collection of games in box with manuals to make rent many years back.

Dave Long
My first was the Master System which came with *Hang On & Safari Hunt* and the lightgun. This got traded for a Mega Drive, which got traded for a PlayStation, which got traded for an Xbox. Years later I'm now paying the price of selling these machines by collecting them!

Gary Glover
Texas Instruments TI99/4a. First game was *Hunchback*, that I copied the code from *Computer & Video Games Magazine*. This was in April 1984.

Newbie Coder
I desperately wanted an Atari 800 after seeing *Star Raiders* running in a shop window but my mum couldn't afford it (they were incredibly expensive) so I ended up with a silent, black and white, 1KB ZX81. But I grew to love that little machine and later the Spectrum.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

N64 MAGAZINE - FULL SET

"I subscribed right from issue one and it was my bible during those years."

PAID: £177

THE CONSOLE ENTHUSIAST

Oliver Hale shares his impressive collection with us

BIO

NAME:
Oliver Hale

LOCATION:
Manchester

FAVOURITE GAME:
Super Mario Bros 3

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Nintendo 64

COLLECTION WORTH:
£12,000 approx

TWITTER:
@RetroGamingGeek

Our latest collector was lucky enough to start his collection by simply keeping hold of his original games and systems. He then began earnestly collecting in the Noughties, but it was actually one of our books, of all things, that led to him securing nearly 60 different consoles.

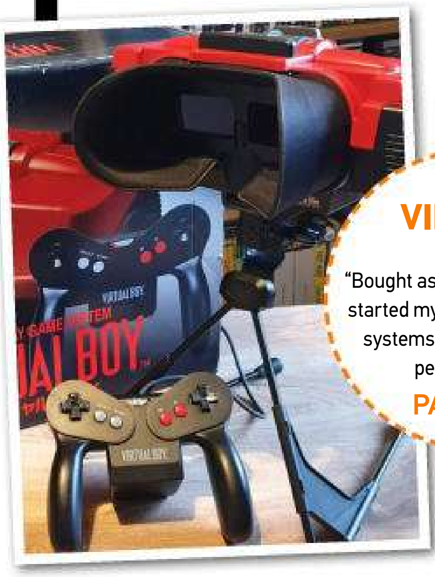
"I bought **Retro Gamer**'s *Hardware Handbook* back in 2009," he tells us. "Prior to that I had been ignorant as to just how many machines were out there. It really fascinated me how many had come and gone, and the more obscure the machine, the more it interested me." That interest led to Oliver picking up numerous systems. "I decided I wanted my collection to represent a snapshot of game consoles," he continues. "I enjoy the failed machines, just as much as the successes. This led to me buying a Virtual Boy, Game.com and even an Ouya."

Oliver is aware that a great number of systems can lead to an inordinate amount of games so he takes care to not "spread myself too thin" and is happy to just own three to five games for certain systems. One console he does collect for however is the Xbox and he's built up a decent selection of games for it. "When I bought it in 2004, the Xbox was the first non-Nintendo console I had owned," he admits. "There are some bold ports, and games that just really should not run on the machine, yet it pulls it off. *Half-Life 2* is a particular achievement, with its physics engine intact. It seems to be an under-appreciated platform at present, so you can pick up some great games for only a few pounds."

Those low prices are important as Oliver is another collector who feels that retro gaming is becoming an expensive hobby to get into. "Big items in the media are fuelling the idea that absolutely everything retro is worth a fortune," he laments. "This is spilling over into the high street and online but as mentioned, that's not to say there aren't bargains. Like it or not retro gaming is much more in the public consciousness now, and the landscape won't ever be like it was in the Noughties as there is now the demand."

Retro games may be in demand now but it hasn't stopped Oliver from adding stuff to his collection and he has an eye for Japanese items, particularly hardware. "I think it's partly down to the air of mystery that surrounds them," he says. "In Europe we barely got a hint of some of the stuff being released in Japan at the time, and it's only as an adult collector I can appreciate how large and varied the Japanese games industry was. Many Japanese consoles pioneered features we take for granted today and it's fascinating to see the ones that did it first. Plus who can argue with the aesthetics, whether that's the consoles, games or the box art. There's just something special about them."

In fact Japanese systems are something Oliver recommends for those stressing over the rising prices of retro. "Don't be afraid to pick up import machines," he concludes. "There are rarely any compatibility issues now with modern TVs. Japanese machines and games often go for a fraction of their Western counterparts and can be a good way to experience those games that otherwise might be out of reach." *



VIRTUAL BOY

"Bought as new old stock, this started my love affair of failed systems. It's not as bad as people think."

PAID: £150

DOKI DOKI PANIC

"The first Japanese game I bought myself, and one with a fascinating double life."

PAID: £40

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

SONIC MOUNTAIN QUEST

"Received as a Christmas gift from my brother, everything about it perfectly encapsulates the Nineties."

PAID: GIFT

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

PANASONIC Q

"Ever since I saw it in the pages of *NGC* magazine, I knew I had to have one of the prettiest game consoles ever released."

PAID: £300

NES

"My love for this hobby can be traced back to this very machine, it was my first ever games console and it's still going strong."

PAID: GIFT

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

EARTHWORM JIM

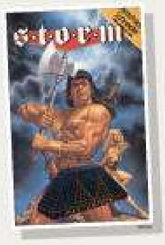
Shiny's game is slowly rising in price with complete PAL and US Mega Drive copies selling for around **£35.** The SNES version is similarly priced although you'll save money by simply buying a loose cart. Alternatively you can get it on the Evercade's *Interplay Volume 1* collection for **£17.99.**

PINBALL DREAMS

While we've seen it as low as **£1.95,** the usual price for this hit Amiga game is **£15** with the MS-DOS version hitting **£20.** The SNES version is pricier with complete PAL versions hitting **£25** and NTSC versions going for **£55.**

ALIEN RESURRECTION

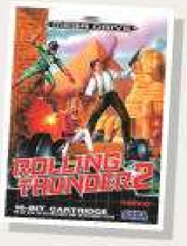
Argonaut's *Alien* game ranges in price between **£10** and **£22,** although you can get it for around **£7** if you don't mind owning just the disc. The US version is usually **£25.**



STORM

If you fancy picking up Mastertronic's *Gauntlet* clone you should be able to get it for less than **£10.** The Amstrad version is cheapest and rarely costs more than **£2.99,** which makes sense as it was the most plentiful version.

ROLLING THUNDER 2

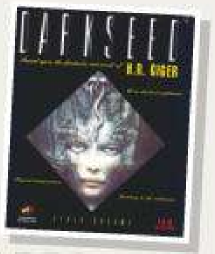


Namco's Mega Drive title is another game that's rising in price. Complete PAL copies hit **£55** while the Japanese release can hit **£80.** The US Genesis release is even pricier and can reach **£110.**

SSX

If you've enjoyed our look at the PS2 games you'll be pleased to hear that the original game typically sells between **£1** and **£5.** The US version is a little more expensive but still available for under a tenner.

DARK SEED



You'll need serious wedge for *Dark Seed*. Complete Amiga copies can hit **£185** in immaculate condition, while the CD32 version goes for **£75.** The PC CD-ROM edition goes for around **£10** and the Saturn and PlayStation versions can be picked up for under **£25.**

HOW MUCH?!

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

While we steer clear of graded games, we still look out for sealed sales and this one had our eyes goggling. This sealed NTSC game included an authentic Kay Bee Toys sticker and sold for a whopping **$4,500.** The **$30** charge to ship it felt a bit cheeky, mind.

Prices correct at time of print

SIGNED, UNSEALED AND DELIVERED

"Sign your name across my retro," asks Paul Drury, politely

Do you know who wrote your favourite book? Of course you do. The author's name is on the cover. And you also know who sang your favourite song and starred in your favourite film. But do you know who created your favourite arcade game?

I certainly didn't back in the late-Seventies and early Eighties, when I was playing *Boot Hill*, *Asteroids*, *Joust* and every other new game that magically appeared, like the shopkeeper from *Mr Benn*, in the small arcade or the cafes and chip shops of my home town of Ripley in Derbyshire.

I do now. One of the many wonderful things about writing for **Retro Gamer** is getting to talk to, and sometimes meet, the people who created the games that I pumped my paper round money into when I was growing up. I'd never been one for collecting autographs but then I discovered the 'arcade flyer' – the advertising sheets, usually A4 in size, produced by Atari, Williams, Gottlieb and all the other coin-op manufacturers, to encourage arcade operators to buy their latest release. I found one for *Q*Bert* on eBay for $10 and as I'd just interviewed the programmer, Warren Davis, for issue 21, I sent it over to him in California and a few weeks later, it arrived back, signed. I got it framed and put it up on the wall… of my toilet. It was soon joined by *Star Wars*, *Dragon's Lair*, *Defender* and a dozen more, all signed by the coders and artists behind each game, a daily reminder of those formative years spent in pursuit of the next high score.

I have over 70 signed flyers now and not enough wall space to show them off so I've branched out into getting other bits of gaming memorabilia signed by their creators. Lots of tapes and cartridges, of course, and as a Commodore kid, I'm particularly proud of *The Count* VIC-20 cartridge and *Sheep In Space* and *Super Pipeline II* on disk, both for the C64, signed by Scott Adams, Jeff Minter and Andy Walker, respectively. I've tried not to be partisan, though, and have a Spectrum signed by both Matthew Smith of *Jet Set Willy* fame and the designer of the machine, Rick Dickinson. Rick sadly passed away in 2018 and that adds a certain poignancy – the things these talented people created will outlast them. I visited both Keith Campbell, who wrote the adventure column for *C&VG*, and Ralph Baer, the inventor of the first home console, the Magnavox Odyssey, to get them to sign pieces of their history. I'm glad I got to tell them in person what their work meant to me before they died.

I think anyone that collects anything will agree that the thrill of the chase is part of the attraction. Managing to get in touch with people like Nolan Bushnell, Eugene Jarvis and Steve Wozniak and getting them to sign stuff was great, though you know it's something they've been asked to do many times before – the latter even has a dedicated 'Signed by Woz' contact email. What is especially sweet is when you ask someone to sign something from their past and they are amazed that you are asking at all. You could tell how surprised Trevor Hall, author of the first C64 title I ever bought, *Twin Kingdom Valley*, was when I got him to scribble his name across an original poster of his game. The same was true for Spaniard Paco Portalo, co-creator of *Bugaboo (The Flea)*, and despite the language barrier, it led to a Making Of feature in issue 91.

Sometimes the chase comes your way and I can vividly recall my eyes widening when I saw that *Tetris* creator Alexey Pajitnov was speaking at Nottingham's GameCity festival back in 2007. I duly harangued him after his talk and he signed his name in Sharpie over the front of my Game Boy, accidentally leaving a fingerprint on it as he handed it back. The ultimate signature, that. I similarly ambushed Masaya Matsuura of *Parappa The Rapper* fame and Masayuki Uemura, father of the NES and SNES, when they came to Nottingham, though possibly the best haul was when the extended team behind *Elite* congregated for the 25th anniversary of the game's release. Getting Ian Bell to sign the same poster as David Braben was an achievement, given Ian refused to share the stage with his one-time collaborator.

No one has ever refused to sign anything, though when I travelled up to Liverpool to ask Matthew Smith to sign a Spectrum to exhibit at the newly opened National Videogame Arcade, he said he didn't want to in case people thought he'd made it. I said I didn't think anyone would get confused but let it lie and we spent the evening drinking Guinness and absinthe. When I awoke the next morning, his distinctive scrawl was there on the machine.

There are still many signatures that I would love to bag in the future. Getting my *Donkey Kong* flyer signed by Shigeru Miyamoto and my *Blueprint* flyer signed by Chris and Tim Stamper would make me very happy but I don't really fancy my chances. A more realistic goal is to try and get **Retro Gamer** 1 and **Retro Gamer** 19 signed by Martyn Carroll and Darran Jones respectively – the issues when each began their tenure as editor of the magazine. It seems strange to ask friends to sign things, but in my dotage, I'd like to look back at this part of my retro life and smile. Hope you can oblige, boys. *

Thanks very much to Ian Pare for the photography.

PRIZED SIGNATURES

WHAT I'D SAVE FIRST FROM THE FIRE

COMPUTER SPACE FLYER

My most prized possession – a flyer for the first ever commercial arcade machine signed by the two men that created it, Ted Dabney and Nolan Bushnell.

GAME BOY

I always liked the clear case version of the Game Boy and was very happy to have mine signed by *Tetris* author Alexey Pajitnov.

POCKET SIMON

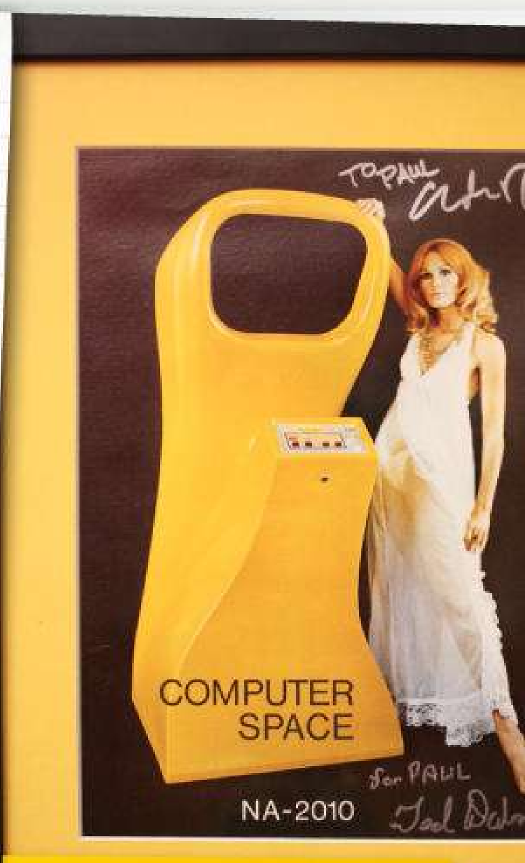
Ralph Baer, the father of the videogame console, also designed the iconic handheld Simon, so I got him to sign the pocket version.

SINISTAR DESIGN DOCUMENT

I interviewed Williams game designer John Newcomer for a Making Of *Sinistar* feature for **Retro Gamer** 125 and was staggered and delighted when he signed his original hand-written design notes and sent them over.

WOOL FROM JEFF MINTER'S FLOCK

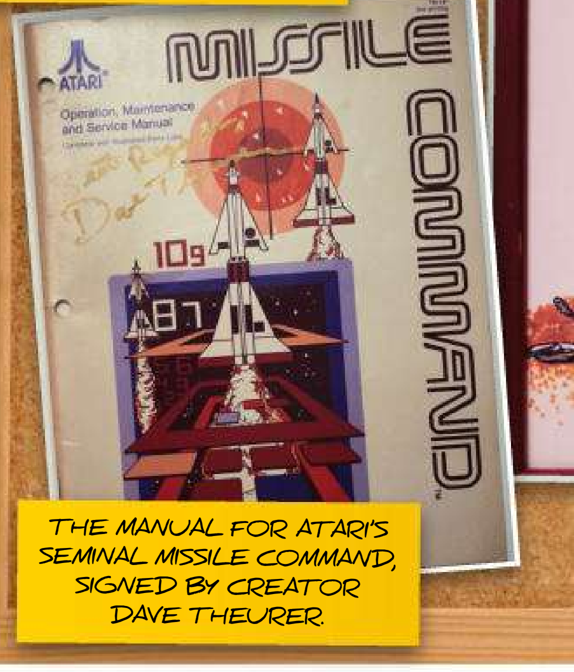
I won this in a videogames quiz – some wool taken from Flossie, the favourite sheep of Jeff Minter, the author of my favourite game, *Sheep In Space*.



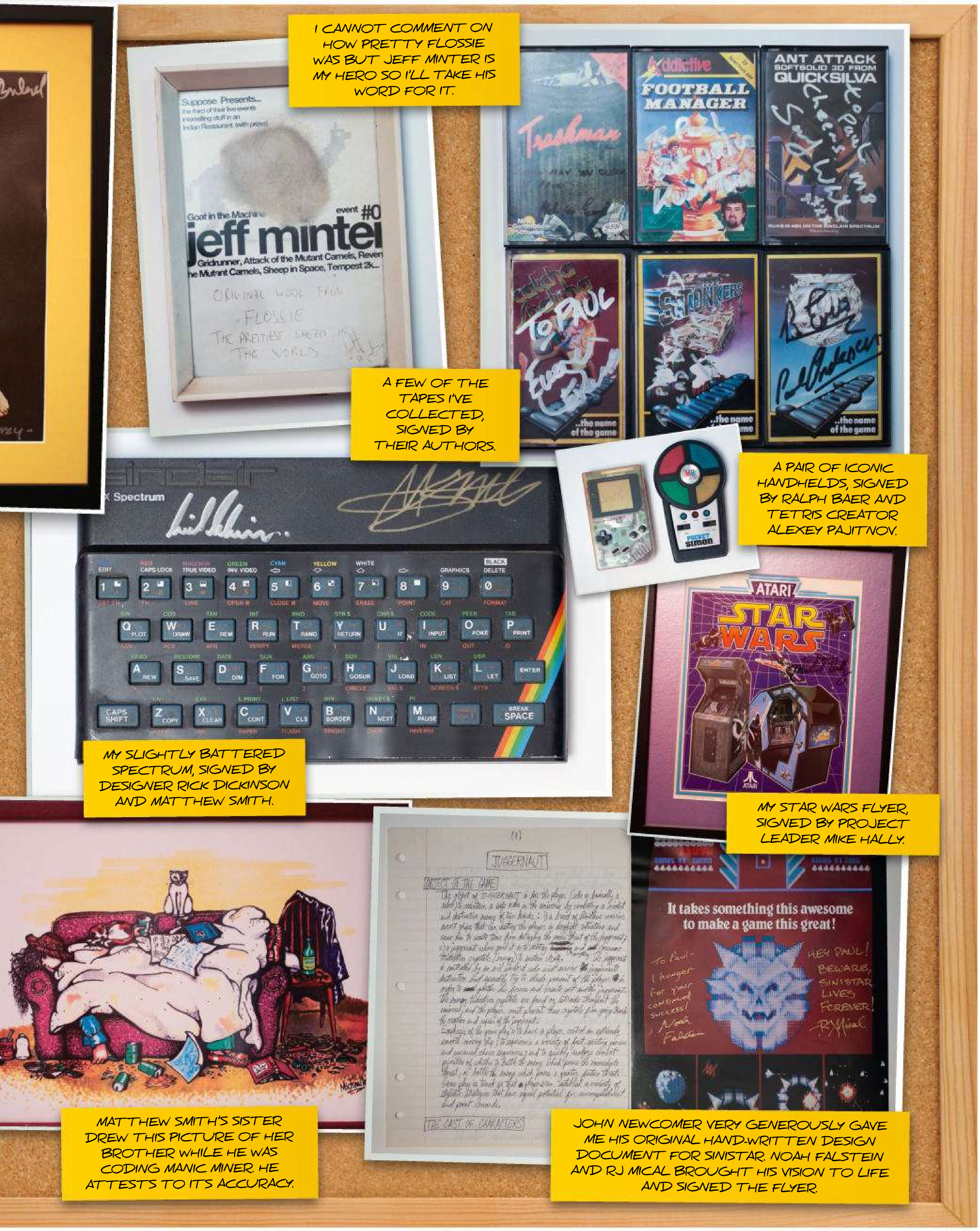
I MANAGED TO GET ATARI FOUNDERS NOLAN BUSHNELL AND TED DABNEY TO SIGN THIS FLYER AND TRIED TO TRACK DOWN THE MODEL, A DANCER AT THE BRASS RAIL STRIP CLUB, BUT FAILED.

commodore
VIC-1917
THE COUNT

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO MEET SCOTT ADAMS AND MASAYUKI UEMURA IN PERSON AND GOT THEM TO SIGN SOMETHING FROM THEIR PAST.



THE MANUAL FOR ATARI'S SEMINAL MISSILE COMMAND, SIGNED BY CREATOR DAVE THEURER.


Suppose Presents...
jeff minter
ORIGINAL WORK FROM FLOSSIE THE PRETTIEST SHEEP IN THE WORLD
Trashman
Football Manager
ANT ATTACK
QUICKSILVA
To Paul
Stonkers
..the name of the game
ZX Spectrum
ATARI
STAR WARS
JUGGERNAUT
OBJECT OF THE GAME
THE CAST OF CHARACTERS
It takes something this awesome to make a game this great!
To Paul - I hunger for your continued success! Noah Falstein
HEY PAUL! BEWARE, SINISTAR LIVES FOREVER! RJ Mical

I CANNOT COMMENT ON HOW PRETTY FLOSSIE WAS BUT JEFF MINTER IS MY HERO SO I'LL TAKE HIS WORD FOR IT.

A FEW OF THE TAPES I'VE COLLECTED, SIGNED BY THEIR AUTHORS.

A PAIR OF ICONIC HANDHELDS, SIGNED BY RALPH BAER AND TETRIS CREATOR ALEXEY PAJITNOV.

MY SLIGHTLY BATTERED SPECTRUM, SIGNED BY DESIGNER RICK DICKINSON AND MATTHEW SMITH.

MY STAR WARS FLYER, SIGNED BY PROJECT LEADER MIKE HALLY.

MATTHEW SMITH'S SISTER DREW THIS PICTURE OF HER BROTHER WHILE HE WAS CODING MANIC MINER. HE ATTESTS TO ITS ACCURACY.

JOHN NEWCOMER VERY GENEROUSLY GAVE ME HIS ORIGINAL HAND-WRITTEN DESIGN DOCUMENT FOR SINISTAR. NOAH FALSTEIN AND RJ MICAL BROUGHT HIS VISION TO LIFE AND SIGNED THE FLYER.

YOUR FAVOURITE SIGNED ITEMS

Readers share their own prized possessions

Richard Brady
I have signed copies of *Super Mario Bros 3*, *Super Mario 64* and *Super Mario Sunshine*. I queued to see Miyamoto years ago in London.

Shiiiva
My *Shenmue III* poster. I won it in a competition and it's signed by Yu Suzuki. *Shenmue III* was my most anticipated game of all time and thanks to the amazing fans, we made it happen after all these years.

Justin Towell
Christmas NiGHTS, UK cardboard slip case version, signed by both Yuji Naka and Takashi Iizuka. So awesome.

John Aycock
An Atari 2600 *Adventure* cartridge signed by Warren Robinett, after he came to give a talk to my students.

Sloanysoft
My copy of *Football Manager* signed by Kevin Toms himself.

Craig Derrick
My copy of *The Secret Of Monkey Island* signed by Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman, after recording a developer commentary for *Monkey Island 2: Special Edition*.

Jake Warren
The original art board of the *Atic Atac* map, drawn and signed by Oli Frey. It appeared in the June 1984 issue of *Crash* magazine.

Chris Parsons
It has to be my Magnavox 2 *Ralph Baer's Pinball* cartridge, signed by the man himself.

Lord Arse!
My hat, signed by Jim Bagley, Mark Jones, Kevin Toms, Steve Turner, the Oliver twins and Jon Hare.

Chris Wilson
I have *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* for the Spectrum signed by Matthew Smith. Despite being a Commodore kid, I'm rather proud of those.

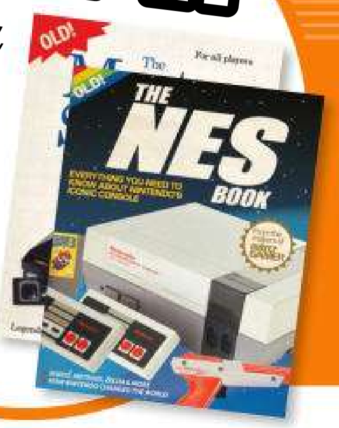
Raymond Stewart
Well, it's not electronic gaming, but my *Warlock Of Firetop Mountain* Fighting Fantasy book signed by both Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

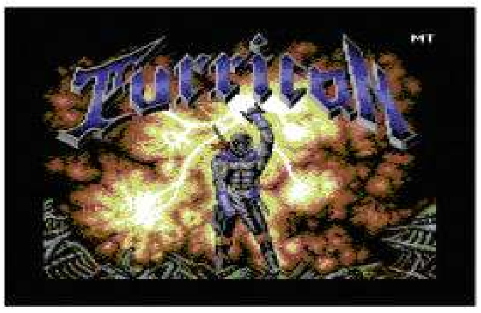
Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



BURNING NOSTALGIA

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
You remain my favourite magazine, and amazing articles like the one on *Turrican* in issue 214 really help keep that nostalgic magic burning. *Turrican* in its brilliant 8-bit incarnation on the C64 was one of my many tape-based starting points in gaming, fuelled in no small part by the brilliant loading screens and music. Is there any chance of running a Top 20 or articles of a similar nature? It would be greatly appreciated, especially if you covered the brilliant artistic efforts by Codemasters, Ocean and Apex. Also, any *Creatures*-related content wouldn't go amiss. Cheers and continue the great work!
Robbie Patterson

We're glad you're enjoying the magazine, Robbie. We've actually got a music article in this very issue that you might find interesting. Otherwise we could certainly run a Top 20 on loading screens and music tracks if we can get some suitable developer input.

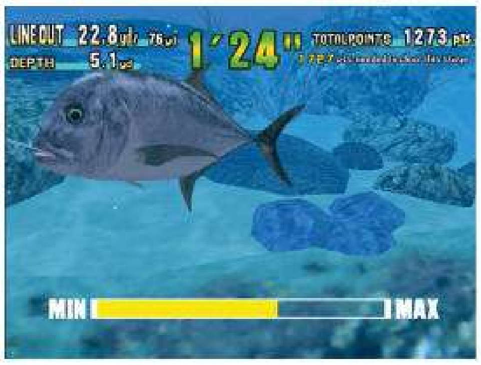


» [C64] Look how dynamic this loading screen is. No wonder it left a big impact on Robbie.

DREAM PLUG

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I am part of the team of contributors for the Dreamcast Junkyard website. I was just wondering if it would be possible to get a little note in the mag plugging our 'Top 200 Games Of The Dreamcast Vote'? Even if just on the letters page. We've run this poll several times before but it hasn't been updated since 2016, so we launched the latest recount/revote this year. The poll itself is staying open until the end of March and it would be fantastic if you could feature it, as we want as wide a voting field as possible.
Kev Mason

No worries Kev, consider your poll well and truly plugged.



» [Dreamcast] Will *Sega Marine Fishing* place high? Cast your votes by visiting bit.ly/junkyardpoll

AN FMV REQUEST

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'm an (almost) new subscriber of your magazine from Italy (started six months ago) even though I already bought one Spanish issue from my time working in Madrid (2017). It is a joy to read your in-depth articles mixed with that English attitude, the content also is absolutely top notch and really expands on the subject matter being covered. Plus I have a real love for paper magazines (I can't stand reading on a screen), and the paper you use makes a so-satisfying crispy sound that I find myself waving the pages just for that!

I have a little request. I found an index of your previous issues, and I noted that you ran a feature on cheesy Nineties FMV games in issue 131. Could you perhaps write a new article on the ingenuity behind these games? I'd love to read it.

Thank you very much, and keep up the good work (you set a very high bar).
Diego Sanziani

It's nice to hear you approve of the magazine, Diego. Nick loves cheesy FMV games so we're sure he'll put something new together once he finds a suitable angle.

12:50
SCAT Team Override

» [Mega-CD] Nick doesn't need much excuse to write about *Night Trap*.

KARATE STUMPED

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Do you know who wrote the Technos profile in issue 20? The list of programmers was a brilliant addition, but I'm wondering if whatever sources the author had access to might be able to reveal who designed and/or programmed *Karate Do: The Way Of Karate*, which was released in the US as *Karate Champ*?

The origins of *Karate Champ* remains one of those strange mysteries. It was an important game that basically kicked off the fighting game genre – *Street Fighter*

STAR LETTER

METROIDVANIA MANIA

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I've largely given up on AAA videogames as they don't offer me the thrill that they used to give me in my 20s. I still play plenty of new games however and they're typically games that remind me of my youth – either due to their simpler game mechanics or because their visuals look 16-bit. While I enjoy a great number of different genres, it's the Metroidvania that I seem to spend most of my time playing at the moment. It seems that every indie developer wants to plant its own flag on this huge mountain and it's easy to see why.

It's a truly compelling genre that often requires good hand-eye coordination and a decent memory (remembering what area your new item will allow you to access). I know that you've run a big feature on the genre in general but it would be so much better if you could perhaps do a big article in the style of this month's SNES feature. I'd love to read it. Even if you don't, I compel your readers to try the genre for themselves, it really is full of wonderful games.
Yours sincerely,
Jason Brown

You've got good taste, Jason. It's a really solid genre and there's plenty of games to discover (in fact, after shmups, Darran probably has more Metroidvanias than any other genre) and the rest of the team enjoy them as well. You've certainly given us food for thought so enjoy a book.

» [Switch] Jason has been playing numerous Metroidvanias, including Thomas Happ's *Axiom Verge*.

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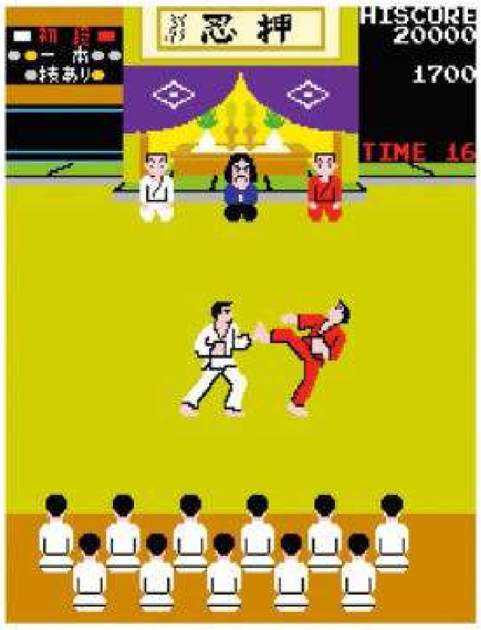
might not have existed without it – and yet we have no idea who actually worked on it, or why that information has been so hard to find compared to most other Technos games.

Anyways, I figured it wouldn't hurt to ask! Thanks.

Kate Willaert

Hi Kate, John Andersen wrote the article and told fellow freelancer John Szczepaniak that Takeshi Yoneda claims to have given "production support" and "supervision" on the game. You can find this information by visiting bit.ly/champcredit



» [Switch] *Karate Champ* is available on Nintendo's console via Hamster's *Arcade Archives* series.

SET A DATE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I've had a subscription for **Retro Gamer** magazine for a number of years and I used to really look forward to getting a calendar included with every end of year issue. The last couple of times I haven't received one. Have you stopped producing them? Or did my issue just not include one?

Thanks in advance,

Rebecca Ashcroft-Smith.

Thanks for getting in touch, Rebecca. We didn't run a calendar in 2020 due to COVID, but there was a calendar with issue 227 (*Halo: Combat Evolved*). Hopefully you'll have now received it.

retro GAMER
2022
CALENDAR

» Hopefully Rebecca will enjoy the calendar that was included with issue 227.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Microsoft buys everything

We've also been discussing Microsoft's megaton announcement and the team has some humble requests. Nick is hoping for *Guitar Halo* or Blur 2, but also wouldn't so no to a Crash Banjocoot crossover. Darran would love a compilation in the style of *Rare Replay* or a *Halo* crossover with *Tony Hawk's* where you can ride the Halo ring, while Tim wants a *Diablo V* where you hack up enemies from every Microsoft-owned game. Andy was too busy playing *Bannerlord* to answer.

» [PC] A new compilation would be a great improvement over *Blizzard Arcade Collection*.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Earthworm Jim memory?

» [Mega Drive] Lots of readers clearly loved the humour in *Earthworm Jim*.

Brad The Hatter
It's hands down the What The Heck level from *Earthworm Jim*. That music track and the screams in the background along with the visual theme makes it one of the most memorable stages in the series.

Steve Hardy
The old stairlift grannies who fall onto Jim, start bashing him and yell "fresh!" It's mad!

Duck Socks
Fighting Evil The Cat in What The Heck. That whole level was brilliant, especially the music.

Ian Johnson
Getting the *Mortal Kombat* reference in *Earthworm Jim 2* as the screen flashes the word 'fight'. Jim then eats Bob The fish.

Luke Middleham
My worst is when I finally got to the last boss, missed my jump onto the platforms that surround her and got a game over without ever taking a shot. I never did get back there.

Mark Norman
It was the first game I played that was so varied in its gameplay, so wacky and with such beautiful artwork. It blew my mind!

Oakhammer
My friend and I trying to solve the underwater/submarine level without refilling the oxygen. Until we found out that you can refill the oxygen. We made it to almost the last turn of the level…

Grobian Gans
The animation of Jim flexing and his pants falling down. On Mega Drive, it came first thing with the Sega logo. Great start! Gnnn! Gnnn! Dow!

Andy Leach
Turning it off. [There's always one – Ed]

Alastair Omand
Buying *Earthworm Jim 2* for the Saturn, not shutting up about it during lunch at Burger King with my family and finally playing it at home, thinking it was the best game ever. The stairlift section with bagpipes playing and grannies falling was absolutely hilarious. I was eight.

Cubism
I loved the cartoon series as a kid. I only rented the Mega Drive game (which is a lot tougher than it looks) but the cartoon was how I knew the characters best.

ThatGrumpyGamer
When that cow you launched on level one drops out of the sky and flattens Princess What's-Her-Name at the end of the game. Pure genius.

Adam Rainbolt
Putting the CD-ROM of the game in the CD player of my truck and listening to the soundtrack and WAV files.

retro GAMER

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Disaster: Day Of Crisis

A DISASTER IN NAME ONLY

» WII » 2008 » MONOLITH SOFT

Massive multinational corporations do not make games for any individual customer – but if they did, *Disaster: Day Of Crisis* might well have been made for me. It's themed around natural disasters, it's ambitious, it's flawed and it made me laugh many times over. You play as Raymond Bryce, a former rescue worker who lost his best friend Steve in a volcanic eruption. One year later, a rogue ex-military unit is making terrorist threats and kidnapping seismologists – including Steve's sister Lisa. Now Ray has to act as a one-man army to prevent a nuclear attack. Things only escalate from there, and while the plot is totally preposterous, it is played entirely straight.

The game itself seems like an experiment in doing as much as possible with the controller, and sometimes it doesn't always work out. There are platform adventure sections where you negotiate hazardous environments. Also, shooting sections akin to *Time Crisis*. Also also, minigames in which you have to rescue injured people, often with the aid of motion controls. *Also* also also, driving bits where you use the Wii controller as a steering wheel, which are generally a bit rubbish. I can understand why it's not for everyone, as it's pretty uneven in quality and motion controls aren't too popular with core gamers.

Having said all that, I do wonder if people even got what *Disaster: Day Of Crisis* was going for. It wasn't released in North America and Reggie Fils-Aimé reportedly didn't like it, which probably had something to do with that. One particular criticism he is alleged to have made was that the voice acting was "laughable", and I won't deny that it *is* ridiculously over the top. But it's part of a game where the lead character eats burgers that are larger than his own head, and tries to outrun a tsunami while being chased by an attack helicopter. *Disaster: Day Of Crisis* feels like a parody of blockbuster disaster movies, and you can debate whether that's intentional but I think it is. Either way, if you take it on those terms you'll probably enjoy it. *

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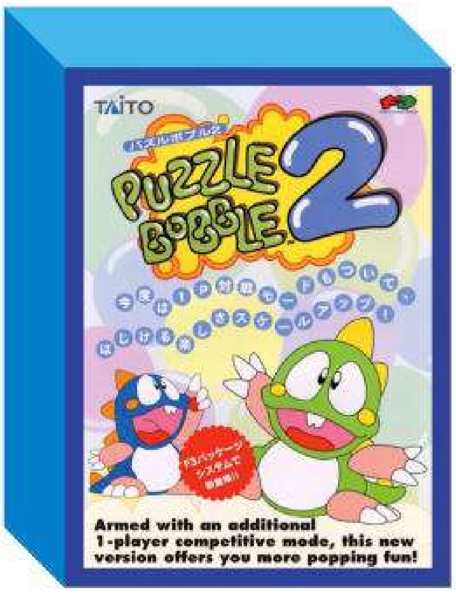
ENDGAME


TAITO
PUZZLE BOBBLE 2
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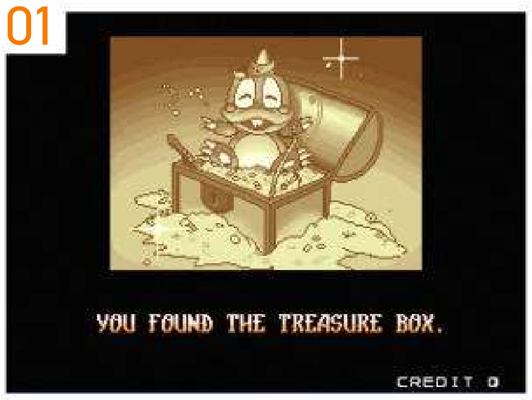
PUZZLE BOBBLE 2

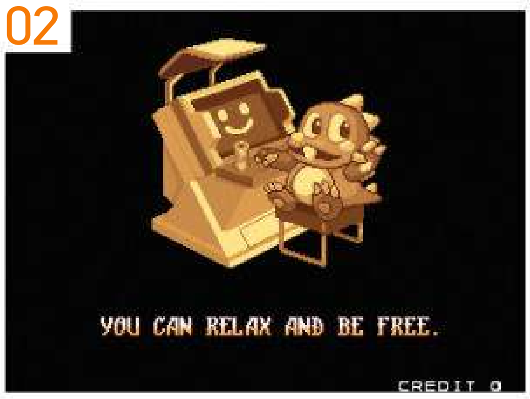
» It's hard not to feel sorry for Bub and Bob. When we first met them they'd been turned into bubble dragons, and even though they became human again for *Rainbow Islands*, they're so famous in their transformed forms that you rarely get to see them as humans. Will the brothers ever be able to get back to living as their original species? Let's skip to the end and find out.

01


YOU FOUND THE TREASURE BOX.

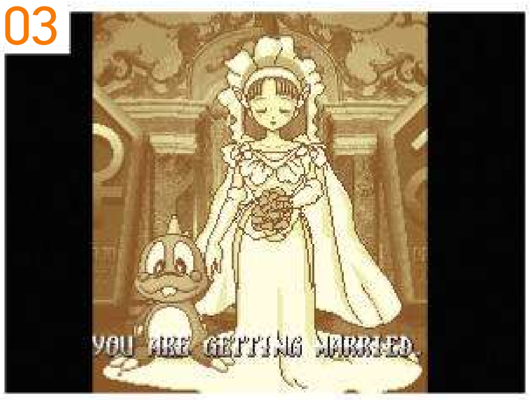
» Bub has found a treasure chest, of the kind he'd regularly encounter in *Rainbow Islands*. That's not a bad prize for winning the Puzzle Mode, but it's hardly the restoration of his humanity, is it? Let's try a different ending.

02


YOU CAN RELAX AND BE FREE.

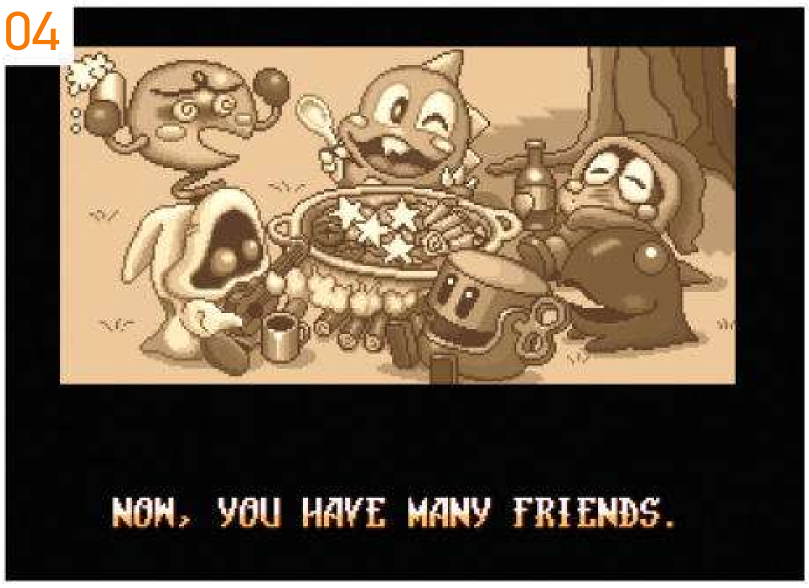
» Here, Bub can relax and be free, as illustrated by his casual pose in front of an arcade machine. There's a certain appeal to all of that, but we reckon the claws would make controlling the game difficult. Next ending!

03


YOU ARE GETTING MARRIED.

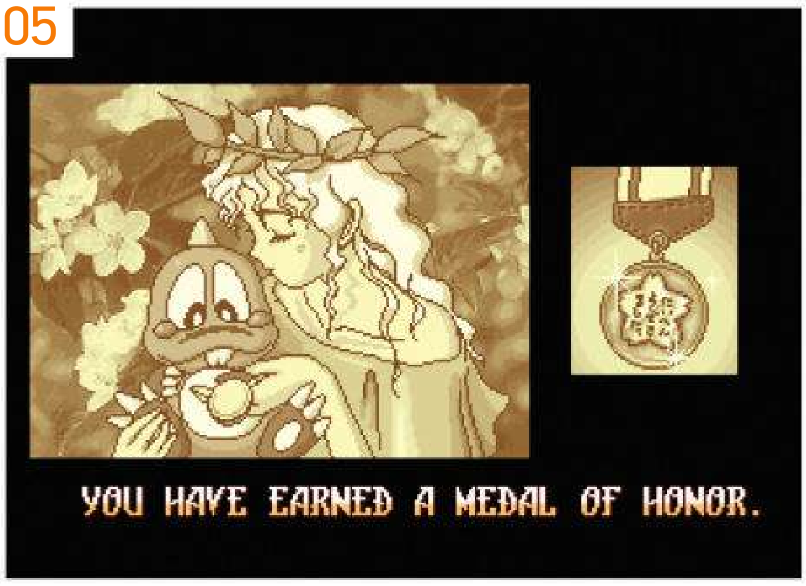
» This time, Bub has found himself a lovely lady and is getting married. But their difference in species will inevitably cause problems, and he'll have enough of those anyway once she tries to walk with him standing on her dress.

04


NOW, YOU HAVE MANY FRIENDS.

» Now this doesn't look to be too bad, Bub has a bunch of mates. Unfortunately, this party actually took place during lockdown, and Bub's protestations that he thought it was a work meeting never seemed legitimate. A new ending is required to get the pressure off Bub, and quickly.

05


YOU HAVE EARNED A MEDAL OF HONOR.

» So this is it. Bub doesn't get his humanity restored, but he does get a shiny medal. He had opportunities for friendship, love, riches or freedom, and all he ultimately acquires is a trinket. At the end of the day, you must ask yourself one question: was it really worth the effort?

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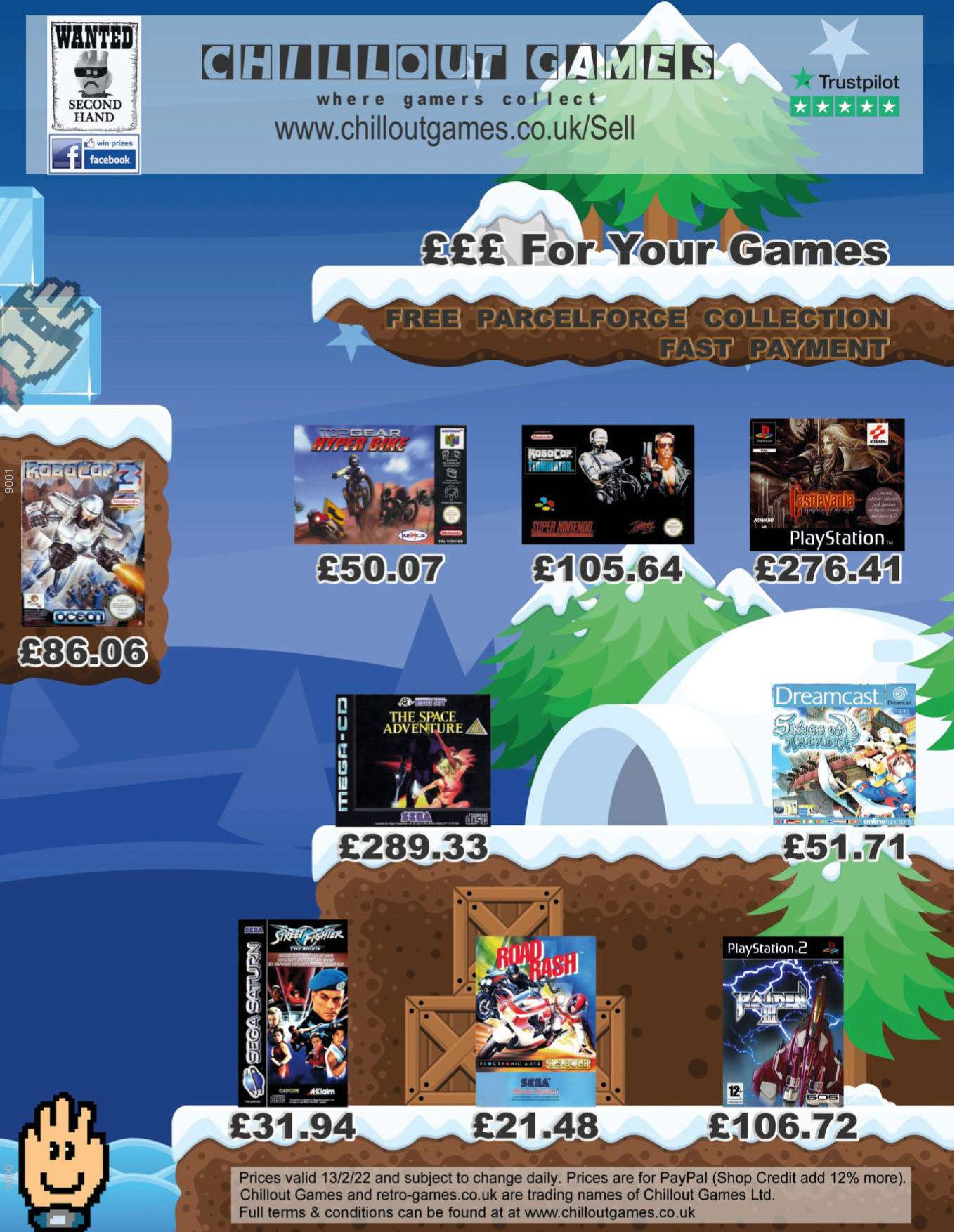

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